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SEPTEMBER 2014 | CONSUMERREPORTS.ORG

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AMERICA'S SCARY PAIN PILL HABIT

Our use of these meds is skyrocketing—and so are overdoses.

Can the FDA do more to protect us?



PLUS

- Alert: Don't take too much of this popular OTC pain reliever
- The healthiest way to banish aches

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**Between 7/1/13 and 9/30/13, the average estimated savings off MSRP presented by TrueCar Certified Dealers to users of the Consumer Reports Build & Buy Car Buying Service, based on users who configured virtual vehicles and subsequently purchased a new vehicle of the same make and model listed on the certificate from Certified Dealers, was \$2,919. Your actual savings may vary. SERVICE NOT AVAILABLE IN CANADA.

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Look for these reports

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TELL US WHAT YOU THINK

Notice something different?

We've been busy improving the look of Consumer Reports and want to know what you think. There will be additional changes in the coming months—but no change in our mission to protect consumers and empower their lives. We'd love to hear your feedback.

Go to CRresearch.org/september14

COMING IN OCTOBER

Windows, space heaters, thermostats, Google Glass and wearable tech, generators, chain saws, 2015 car preview.

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Ratings We rate products using these symbols:

● Excellent ● Very good ○ Good ● Fair ● Poor



ON YOUR MIND

No safety in numbers

"Your Secrets Aren't Safe" (July 2014) was informative and helpful but raised an issue that has had me fuming for months. I have long followed the excellent advice not to hand out my Social Security number at doctors' offices and health care facilities or to carry my SS card with me. But I do have to carry my Medicare card and give out that number—which is my Social Security number followed by a letter. I believe that practice exposes a huge segment of the population to a variety of hazards.

—Liv Bliss Lakeside, AZ

Your suggested "memorable yet almost impenetrable" password in "Your Secrets Aren't Safe" seems neither memorable nor almost impenetrable to me: It's fully impenetrable! One suggestion I've seen is to use the first letter of each word in a memorable (but perhaps silly) sentence, such as "who needs all these 36 damn PASSWORDS," resulting in "wnat36"P"

—Philip Smith Merritt Island, FL

Free? Think again.

In Viewpoint (July 2014) you state "College is free in Tennessee." Nothing is free. When the government gives something away to anybody, it means it is taking more money out of the pockets of those who earn. It's a shame, and we will all pay dearly in the end for such irresponsibility.

—David Reams Myrtle Beach, SC

Viva l'Italia

Thanks for encouraging readers to cook from scratch by including an Italian salad dressing recipe in "Dressing That Makes a Splash" (Up Front, July 2014). I tried it, and it came out great.

—Susan Pratt Port Townsend, WA

Clarification An item in the Up Front section for May 2014 was unclear about the use of the label "antibiotic free" for eggs. Because the term is undefined by regulators, it should not be relied on if you are looking for eggs from chickens that were not fed antibiotics.

ASK OUR EXPERTS

Q. I always mulch when mowing, and sometimes I bag clippings to reduce thatch buildup. How is bagging efficiency affected as a result of using a mulching rather than a regular/all-purpose blade?

—Ed Krautsdorfer Denham Springs, LA

Depending on whether you're using a walk-behind mower or a lawn tractor, using a mulching blade for bagging is not the best idea. A bagging blade has a bend or wing at the back to create more airflow to send the grass to the bag. Almost all walk-behind mowers have a combination blade, which does all modes without changing the blade. Many lawn tractors have a specific blade for mulching, which is designed just for the double cutting action needed for good mulching. Using mulching blades for bagging will result in reduced bag filling. It is best to bag using the bagging blades.

Q. How do you research an assisted-living facility for your parents?

—Marilyn McCabe via e-mail

Start by asking sources that you know and trust—word-of-mouth referrals can be very helpful. Caregiving support groups, hospice agencies, or the local Area Agency on Aging (find the nearest office at eldercare.gov, which also has plenty of other useful information on the topic) are often quite knowledgeable about the best (and worst) regional home-care agencies and senior-living communities.

Be aware that there is no typical assisted-living residence; they vary widely in size, appearance, cost, and services. And none are regulated by the federal government. When you're searching, it's critical to consider the level of care your parents need and their budget.

Be sure to check with the state licensing agency and ombudsman's office to see whether any complaints have been filed against facilities you pick. Also check the AARP website (aarp.org) for lots of helpful information and links to resources, including a comprehensive checklist of questions to ask each facility you visit.

Q. Many sources, including CONSUMER REPORTS, extol the advantages of programmable thermostats. But are they a good thing for electric heat pumps, which deliver less heat over a longer time than electric ones?

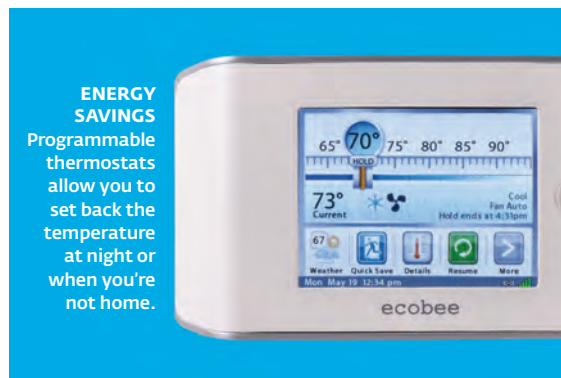
—Larry Jackson Spartanburg, SC

Any energy savings occur only during the setback period: about 1 percent savings for every degree difference compared with the normal house temperature. Heat pump systems tend to have less excess capacity, and during cold weather they can take longer to recover to normal temperatures. To compensate, you can reduce the amount of temperature change, though a smaller setback means less savings.

Q. Trans fats are bad, but are they really worse than other types of fat?

—Jeff DiDonato Boston

Yes. Trans fats, which are made by adding extra hydrogen to vegetable oils, originally seemed like a promising alternative to butter because they provided a similar taste without the saturated fat and cholesterol. But they turned out to be even worse for our health than saturated fat. Not only do they raise LDL (bad) cholesterol, but they also lower HDL (good) cholesterol and might contribute to inflammation. You can avoid them by steering clear of products that list partially hydrogenated oil as an ingredient.



ENERGY SAVINGS
Programmable thermostats allow you to set back the temperature at night or when you're not home.



WHERE WE STAND

Abusive banking practices on college campuses

THE ISSUE Financial institutions are working with universities to gain access to young consumers, offering million-dollar kickbacks to schools that steer students (and their financial aid) to questionable bank accounts.

OUR TAKE Universities should be shepherding their students toward degrees and not needlessly expensive financial products. Thankfully, lawmakers in both the Senate and the House of Representatives have recently introduced bills aimed at ending those kickbacks and conflicts of

interest between schools and banks.

"This legislation would put a stop to strong-arm tactics, like delaying the disbursement of federal student aid for students who opt out of their college's preferred bank partner," says Suzanne Martindale, staff attorney for Consumers Union. "The

arrangements would be more transparent, and it would get rid of a lot of the gifts and incentives that are used to pull students and schools into these bad deals."

We'll continue to support these bills and any other efforts to clean up campus banking. Follow the progress at DefendYourDollars.org.

"A post-antibiotic era—in which common infections and minor injuries can kill—far from being an apocalyptic fantasy, is instead a very real possibility for the 21st century."

—That's the conclusion of the World Health Organization's new report on how the drugs we've relied on for 70 years to fight bacterial infections are becoming powerless. Find out why and how best to protect yourself and others from antibiotic-resistant infections by going to ConsumerReports.org and reading our investigation, "Why You Should Be Worried about Antibiotics."

Join our board of directors

We are seeking applications for service on the Consumer Reports board of directors from individuals who share a passion for protecting and advancing the interests of consumers. This year, we are especially interested in adding financial skills and expertise related to the development or business aspects of consumer-focused digital products and services. Applications should be submitted online at ConsumerReports.org/boardapplication by Sept. 30. A committee of the board will review applications, conduct interviews, and recommend a slate to stand for election to a three-year term of board service beginning in October 2015. Board members are required to attend three two-day meetings per year and participate in board business by phone and e-mail on an ongoing basis. No compensation is provided, but travel expenses are covered.



Farewell

This is my last column, as I'll be retiring after 13 years as Consumer Reports'

president (and before that 22 years on the board). I feel proud that CR has accomplished so much, for so many consumers, during my time here. I'll be sad to leave my passionate, mission-driven, extraordinarily talented colleagues. But I also feel enthused about new adventures.

Most of all, I feel very excited about CR's future. We're mobilizing new digital tools and channels to engage with you and enable you to engage with other consumers.

I'm also excited that our advocacy arm, Consumers Union, has the potential to grow even stronger as the tenacious, we've-got-your-back consumer watchdog fighting against the legions of special-interest lobbyists and massive campaign contributions that threaten to undermine basic consumer rights and protections.

Challenges loom for Consumer Reports and those we serve as new products and services proliferate and the marketplace becomes more complex. What we stand for and believe in remains unchanged: unleashing the world-changing power of consumers.

CR's expert Ratings and advice help you make informed choices as an individual consumer. And our work to mobilize consumers collectively produces protections and marketplace changes for all.

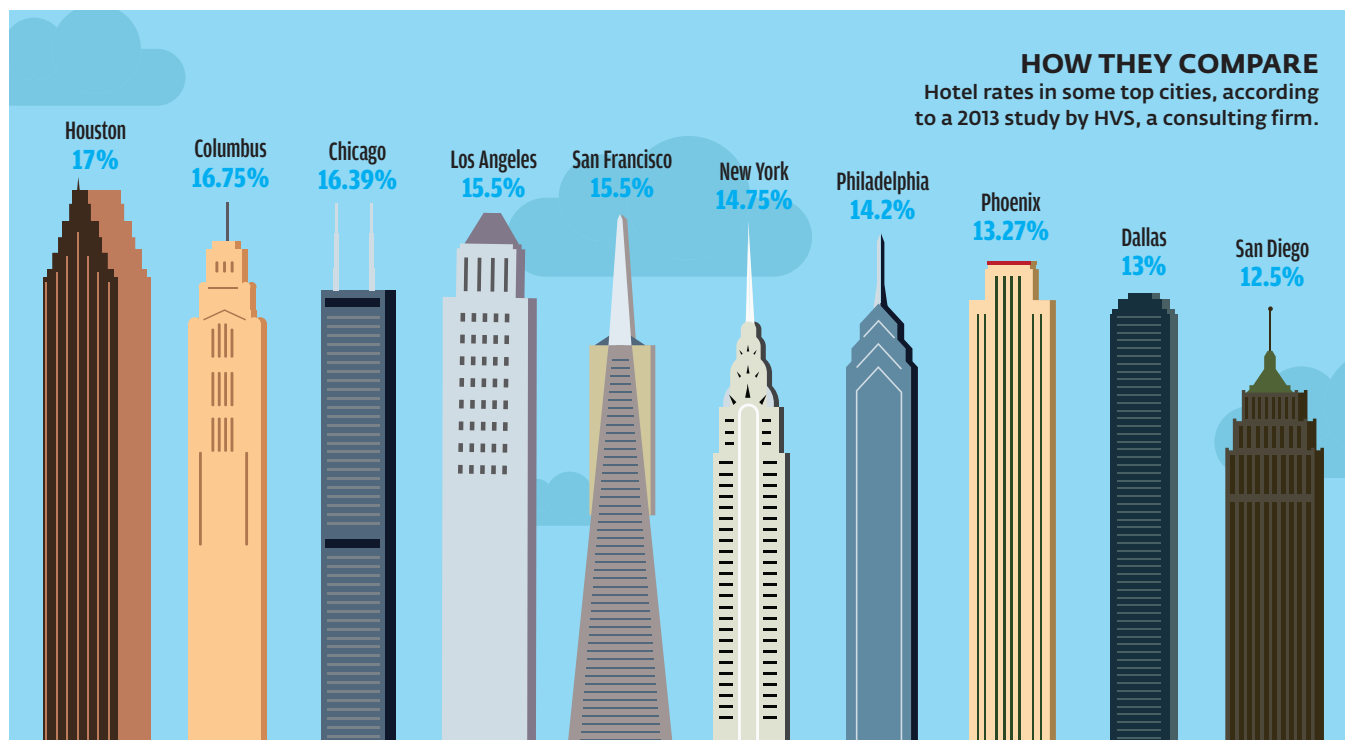
I know I leave Consumer Reports in trustworthy hands—that the board, the staff, and CR's new president will carry forward with passion, savvy, and exceptional service. CR enjoys the crucial support of millions like you who engage with us in so many ways. And we're now serving the new generation of consumers as well.

It has been a privilege to serve Consumer Reports and all who depend on and support this amazing institution. Thank you.

Jim Guest
Jim Guest
President

Looking back to 1978, page 13.

Up Front



Hotel taxes go sky-high

YOU KNOW IT will cost you a bundle for a sweet suite in a glitzy destination like San Francisco or New York. But tax rates of 15 percent or more in many locales will absolutely blow your socks off. In Milwaukee, Wis., for example, the 17.35 percent rate means a tax bill of \$52 on a \$300-a-night room.

Total tax rates—state, county, and city, and miscellaneous add-ons—in the 150 top urban centers range from a low of 7 percent (Lancaster, Calif.) to a whopping 17.74 percent (St. Louis), according to a study by HVS, a consulting firm for the global lodging industry. The average was about 13.4 percent. Eleven other cities have rates of at least 17 percent: Birmingham and Mobile, Ala.; Omaha, Neb.; Milwaukee; Chattanooga and Knoxville, Tenn.; Anaheim and Garden Grove, Calif.; Indianapolis; Houston; and Overland Park, Kan.

By contrast, some touristy hot spots ranked relatively low on the list. The tax rate

in Colorado Springs, Colo., is 9.4 percent; in San Diego, it's 12.5 percent; Salt Lake City, 12.6 percent; and in New Orleans, La., Las Vegas, Miami, and Dallas, 13 percent. And Honolulu? Hawaii's largest city came in at 13.75 percent.

Why do hotel tax rates seem out of whack with tariffs on clothing and restaurant meals? For one thing, visitors don't vote. Lodging taxes are viewed as a politically viable way to raise revenue because most hotel guests are not constituents, says Thomas Hazinski, the managing director of HVS. But guests often benefit, too, because the funds often help support tourism.

"If used wisely," Hazinski says, "the revenues from these taxes can generate significant economic returns to a community."

Because the taxes are a percentage of a room's cost, they can add up to substantial dollars. In 2012 New York City took in \$487 million in lodging tax revenue, up more than

\$100 million since 2008. San Francisco was next, with \$240 million. Most lodging taxes are used for general-fund purposes, to promote convention and tourism business, and to finance public facilities. There's little you can do to avoid them, but there are ways to avoid sticker shock from unexpected charges on your bill at checkout.

- Before booking, ask whether there are charges for anything other than room occupancy and sales tax. Many resort hotels impose a fee whether or not you use the golf course or play tennis, and some hotels automatically tack on a tip for staff.
- Scrutinize the hotel's arrival and departure policies. There might be a hefty penalty if you want to check in early or leave late.
- Before using room service, a fitness facility, and other amenities, ask about fees.
- If you think you've been billed unfairly, speak up. Success rates usually range from 10 to 20 percent, depending on the fee.

Milk alternatives: Should you sip or skip?

THE DAIRY AISLE might seem more crowded lately. Soy milk has been around for years, but “milk” made from nuts, seeds, grains, and coconut are gaining shelf space—and capturing the interest of consumers.

Twenty-one percent of Americans report picking up more milk alternatives, and 15 percent say they’re buying less milk or none at all, according to a report from the market research firm Mintel. Those alternatives make life easier for vegans and people with dairy allergies and lactose intolerance, but how do they stack up nutritionally compared with milk? See what an 8-ounce glass of milk and milk alternatives give you.

Cow's milk (1 percent)

- 102 calories
- 8.2 grams protein
- 2.4 grams fat
- 31 percent of the recommended daily value for calcium

Pros It has muscle-strengthening protein and bone-fueling calcium, phosphorus, and vitamin D.

Cons In addition to having some saturated fat, it contains lactose, a sugar that some people have trouble digesting. And allergies to proteins in cow's milk may be a concern, especially for children.

Coconut milk

(unsweetened or original)

- 40 to 80 calories
- 0 grams protein
- 4.5 to 5 grams fat
- 30 to 45 percent of the recommended daily value for calcium

Pros Not to be confused with the fattier stuff in cans, the coconut-milk beverage found in cartons in the dairy case is watered down to match milk's consistency and fat content. It's usually fortified with calcium and vitamin D; some brands add vitamin B12. In our tasting of five coconut milks and coconut-almond blends, Silk Almond-Coconut Blend Original was the tastiest.

Cons It has zero protein. It doesn't come in low-fat versions, so it's closer to whole or 2 percent milk. And the fat is mostly saturated. Depending on the brand, the milk may have a big coconut flavor or almost none at all.

Soy milk (low-fat plain)

- 60 to 90 calories
- 4 to 6 grams protein
- 1.5 to 2 grams fat
- 20 to 45 percent of the recommended daily value for calcium

Pros Made from ground soybeans and water, it contains high-quality protein and is often fortified with B vitamins, calcium, and vitamin D, giving it the closest nutrition profile to cow's milk among the plant-based options.

Cons Flavored varieties have added sugars. And most soybeans are grown from genetically modified seeds. Look for brands with the USDA organic seal or the non-GMO verified label.

Rice milk (unsweetened)

- 90 to 130 calories
- 1 gram protein
- 2 to 2.5 grams fat
- 30 percent of the recommended daily value for calcium

Pros It's one of the least allergenic beverages, and some brands are fortified with calcium, vitamin B12, and iron.

Cons Our tests found that products made with rice, including rice milk, contain detectable levels of arsenic, a carcinogen. Our experts recommend drinking no more than ½ cup per day and not giving rice milk regularly to children younger than 5.



SILK SOYMILK VANILLA

Our sensory panelists judged this best of the four products they tasted. Compared with the 1 gram of sugars in unsweetened soy milk, it has 8 grams (the equivalent of 2 teaspoons), mostly from added cane sugar.

BLUE DIAMOND ALMONDS'

ALMOND BREEZE ORIGINAL It has added sugars, and it was the best of the eight tasted. A reduced-sugar variety has just 3 grams of sugars.

Almond milk (unsweetened plain)

- 30 to 50 calories
- up to 1 gram protein
- 2 to 2.5 grams fat
- 30 to 45 percent of the recommended daily value for calcium

Pros Made from ground almonds and water, it's naturally lower in calories and fat than cow's milk. It supplies some vitamin E and is often fortified with calcium and vitamin D.

Cons It's very low in protein. Check labels for sugar content; some brands are lightly sweetened, but others have the equivalent of almost 2 teaspoons.

Hemp milk

- 70 to 140 calories
- 2 to 3 grams protein
- 5 to 7 grams fat
- 30 to 50 percent of the recommended daily value for calcium

Pros The hemp seeds used to make this milk are rich in omega-3 and omega-6 fats, which are good for the heart and brain. It's fortified with calcium and vitamins B12 and D.

Cons Hemp has an earthy, beany-nutty flavor, which our sensory panelists deemed an acquired taste. You might see cane juice or brown rice syrup on the ingredients lists of some brands' sweetened varieties. But those are just other names for sugar. Brown rice syrup may also contain arsenic.

New Amazon Fire Phone is born to shop

AMAZON'S FIRST SMART PHONE, the Fire, is a device with a mission: to help you spend money. Its Firefly app can recognize text, video, music, even everyday objects—100 million of them, according to the company—then help you buy them from Amazon.

The Fire wasn't available for purchase at press time, but we'll be testing it in our lab soon. It was due out at the end of July from Amazon and AT&T, the exclusive service provider, for \$200 (32GB) or \$300 (64GB) with a two-year contract. Here's our take based on what we know so far:

The Fire Phone looks a bit like a large iPhone 5 with rounded, rubberized edges. It's a bit heavier than the Samsung Galaxy S5, at 5.6 ounces, and a bit thicker. The 4.7-inch display creates a 3D-like effect Amazon calls Dynamic Perspective by using four front-facing cameras, one at each corner. They track your face, and when you tilt your head or the phone, flat images appear to have depth. The 3D effect could be useful in mapping and gaming, among other things.

If you're thumb-tied, you can tilt the Fire

rather than touch the screen to scroll up and down Web and e-book pages, and to see different product views in Amazon's shopping app. Amazon says that a flick of the wrist calls up several menu options, including the shopping cart (no surprise there). The phone, like the Kindle Fire tablet, uses Amazon's Silk browser. It also has apps often used on newer Kindle tablets, including Mayday (live video-chat tech support) and X-Ray (which offers details on videos you're watching, such as info on actors and background music). The ASAP feature suggests videos based on your viewing habits and caches them to start instantly. In addition to Amazon's retail and content services, the Fire Phone supports Netflix, HBO Go, Hulu Plus, and ESPN. Amazon's app market isn't as large as Apple's or Google's.

The Fire comes with unlimited photo and video storage on Amazon's Cloud Drive. At press time, there was a limited-time offer of a free, one-year subscription to Prime, its two-day delivery/streaming video service, which usually costs \$99 per year.



TILT IT The Amazon Fire Phone lets you angle the screen to scroll up and down.

Fix mistakes on your medical bill

Has this ever happened to you? You go to see a specialist for an ailment thinking that you've lined up everything with your health insurer ahead of time. You get your checkup,

hand over your co-payment, and off you go.

Except that several weeks later you get a doctor's bill that you weren't expecting, and it's for hundreds of dollars.

The problem isn't that uncommon. Seven percent of claims contained errors in 2013, the American Medical Association says.

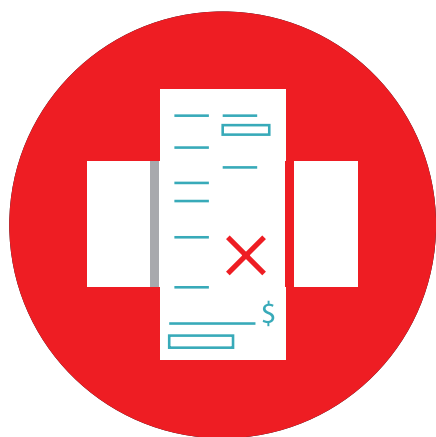
Here are common mistakes and how to avoid them:

No discount. Insurers usually negotiate discounted rates from doctors based on the network's arrangement. But sometimes the medical providers try to bill you for the difference. Don't pay it. Instead, get the explanation of benefits from your insurer to see what the cost differences are. Then get your insurer to call the medical office to straighten out the mess.

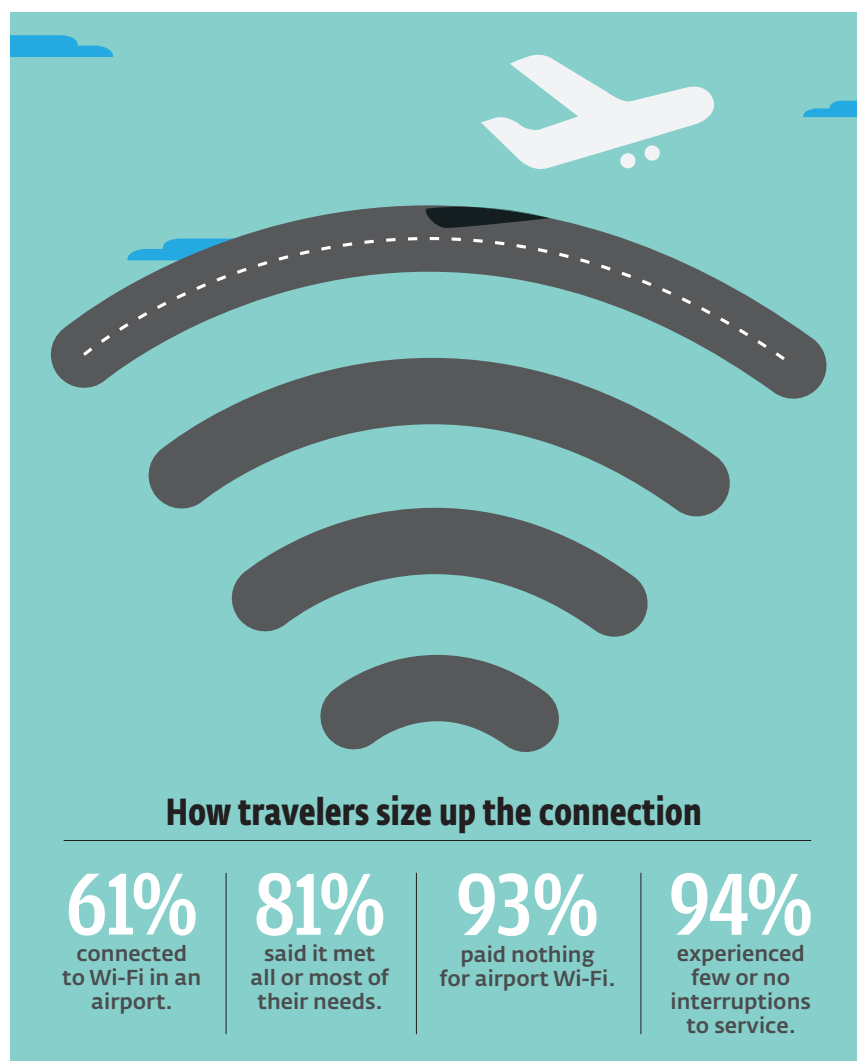
Wrong code. An insurance company won't pay if the doctor uses the wrong medical

code, which tells the reason for the medical treatment. Some of the mistakes might be obvious, such as a dropped number. But others might be harder to spot, such as a code for an ailment that you don't have or a code that doesn't match up with the treatment. Check with your insurer about the reason for the rejection and have the doctor resubmit the bill with the correct information. **Missing referral.** That's something you need to pay attention to ahead of time to avoid problems later. Your plan might require approval for certain tests and procedures, or for a referral to a specialist. Take care of it before you make that appointment to save yourself a lot of headaches and a lot of money.

Medical billing mistakes might become more common next year as doctors and insurers get used to a new system of coding medical diagnoses. So get ready to scrutinize your bills even further.



Free Wi-Fi takes off at airports



PLENTY OF AIR TRAVELERS are making connections these days—and we’re not talking about flights. A recent survey by the Consumer Reports National Research Center found that 85 percent of pleasure travelers with a mobile device connected it to the Internet while they were in an airport.

About three out of five airport Web surfers connected via Wi-Fi; a similar percentage used 3G/4G cellular service. A large majority of travelers who connected to airport Wi-Fi—93 percent—paid nothing for the privilege. Free Wi-Fi is now available at close to half of the 30 busiest U.S. airports,

according to Boingo, which provides the service at airports around the world. Atlanta’s Hartsfield-Jackson airport, the busiest in the country, is among the latest to drop its wireless access fees.

There are still holdouts, though. Chicago’s O’Hare is among the major hubs that charge for Wi-Fi: \$7 for 24 hours. LaGuardia, John F. Kennedy International, and Newark Liberty International charge \$5 per hour. But at press time, the Port Authority of New York/New Jersey, which runs those three airports, was about to sign a new wireless contract that provides 30 minutes of free access with

an \$8-per-day option. Wi-Fi systems are expensive for airports to maintain, requiring tens, if not hundreds, of access nodes dispersed across numerous terminals. Advertising helps recoup some of the cost, but airports have historically relied on service charges, although few travelers pay for Wi-Fi there, as our survey found. “If Starbucks can give away free Wi-Fi, so should airports,” said Michael Boyd, the president of Boyd Group International, a consulting firm for the aviation industry. In his own travels, Boyd says he prefers to use his cellular network to connect to the Internet, citing more reliable connections.

Our survey supports that: Fewer 3G/4G users reported service interruptions at airports than Wi-Fi users. Both groups were generally satisfied with the reliability and speed of the wireless connection. The survey was conducted in March 2014 with 6,205 Consumer Reports online subscribers who own a smart phone, tablet, laptop, or Chromebook and had traveled for business or pleasure in the previous 12 months.

As much as free Wi-Fi appeals to travelers, there’s a potential downside: a sluggish connection. “When an airport switches to free Wi-Fi, you experience a tragedy of the commons, where there are 10 times more users consuming 20 times more data,” said Christian Gunning, Boingo’s vice president of corporate communications. Leisure travelers are more likely to use free Wi-Fi for data-intensive tasks such as streaming video, he said, which slows down the connection for everyone. Gunning favors a tiered system with a time- or speed-based limit on free connections and a fee for premium access.

That’s what you’ll find at Los Angeles International Airport, which offers basic service free and charges for higher-speed premium service (\$5 for one hour or \$8 for 24-hour access). Miami International provides free access to travel-related websites and charges \$5 for 30 minutes of unrestricted Wi-Fi, \$8 for 24 hours. Minneapolis-St. Paul International and Raleigh-Durham International give you free Wi-Fi in 45-minute intervals if you watch an ad or, at MSP, take a survey.



Brewers growl with delight

If you're a fan of small craft brewers and cider mills, you're in luck. Several states have recently relaxed laws to make it easier to tap into so-called growlers.

Those are containers, often glass jugs, that hold 32 to 64 ounces of beverage. Small breweries and cider mills fill them up for customers, who take them home for consumption, then take them back for a refill.

Several states, including New York, Ohio, and Washington, have recently loosened rules on growlers and similar containers to promote the growth of small craft industries and maybe help tourism. Lawmakers also see it as a way to boost agriculture—hops, rye, and grapes, for example, are common ingredients—at a time when farmland is giving way to development.

Rules vary among states concerning when and how beer can be consumed on premises or whether it can be taken away. Bart Watson, chief economist for

the Brewers Association in Boulder, Colo., says that beer regulation has been changing quickly as states try to promote their local products and that this is a recent example. "We've seen growlers become a hot topic lately," he says.

For consumers, growlers are a way to sample some interesting local fare for a modest price. A brewery on the East End of Long Island in New York charges \$19 to fill a 4-pint container of its locally produced craft beer.

In Vermont, changes in the law last year allowed the use of growlers beyond breweries. One company announced plans to open a craft-beer filling station in South Burlington, where people could choose from 20 types of beer.

According to data from the Brewers Association, craft-beer sales were up more than 17 percent last year, even as overall beer sales were losing their fizz, declining 1.9 percent. Sales of imported beer were also lower, but craft-beer exports shot up substantially.

Playing together: Apple's new software

Starting this fall, Apple plans to yoke its desktop and mobile devices more tightly together. What does it mean for consumers? Computers running the new operating system OS X Yosemite (aka version 10.10) will have new ways to trade information with iPhones and iPads that have been upgraded to the latest mobile software, iOS 8. For instance, when a call comes in to your iPhone, caller ID will pop up on your laptop's screen, and you'll be able to answer the call without reaching for the phone. Android fans point out that some of Apple's new features simply echo aspects of Google Now and the Chrome browser. But Apple is promising a high level of convenience for anyone willing to commit to the company's products across the board. Here are some of the highlights:

AirDrop. This file-sharing feature will now operate between desktop and mobile devices. A photo stored on your Mac laptop will show up on your iPad or iPhone as long as the device is nearby.

Continuity. All of your devices will be aware of what you're doing, midtask. You can start writing a text message on a phone and continue on a laptop. Caller ID will pop up on the desktop screen when a phone call comes in. Both products need to be on the same Wi-Fi network.

Handoff. This feature makes it easy to start working on a document on your iPad, then switch to a Mac.

Health. A new app displays data from multiple fitness apps, and back-end tools allow developers to access a variety of health data. It remains to be seen how useful the new app will be.

iMessage. Improvements include a tap-to-talk feature that makes it easy to send a voice or video recording.

Instant HotSpot. The system will notice if you're working on a MacBook in a spot without Wi-Fi and automatically set up a hot spot using your iPhone.

Mail Drop. Users will be able to use iCloud to share huge files—up to 5GB in size—without compression.





RECALLS

AUTOMOBILES

'04-'08 Chevrolet Malibu and Malibu Maxx, and Pontiac G6

If the transmission shift cable fractures while you're driving, the gear selection may not match the indicated gear and the car may move unexpectedly. Also, when you stop and park, despite choosing the Park position, the transmission may not be in Park and the car may roll.

MODELS This recall expands on a previous one in April 2014 of 56,214 '07 and '08 Saturn Auras. An additional 1,074,899 model year '04-'08 Chevrolet Malibu and '04-'07 Malibu Maxx, and '05-'08 Pontiac G6 vehicles have been included.

WHAT TO DO Dealer will replace the shift-cable assembly and mounting bracket. Call GM at 800-553-6000 for details.

'02-'04 Toyota Corolla, Corolla Matrix, Tundra, and Sequoia; Lexus SC; and Pontiac Vibe

A safety defect in the passenger-side front air-bag inflator may produce excessive internal pressure. If the air bag deploys, the inflator may rupture, possibly causing metal fragments to hit and seriously injure the driver or passengers.

MODELS 844,277 '02-'04 Toyota Sequoia and Lexus SC, and '03-'04 Toyota Corolla, Corolla Matrix, and Tundra, and Pontiac Vibe vehicles.

WHAT TO DO Dealer will replace the passenger-side

air-bag inflator. Call Toyota at 800-331-4331 or GM at 800-521-7300 for details.

'08-'11 Ford Escape and Mercury Mariner

The steering torque sensor may not be able to properly detect driver steering. The system could then remove the electric power steering assist, and greater effort would be required to steer the vehicle.

MODELS 740,878 '08-'11 Ford Escape and Mercury Mariner vehicles manufactured Aug. 18, 2006, through Sept. 11, 2010.

WHAT TO DO Dealer will update the necessary software. Call Ford at 800-392-3673 for details.

HOUSEHOLD PRODUCTS

Lithonia Lighting Quantum ELM and ELM2 two-light emergency fixtures

The circuit board can overheat, causing the fixture to melt and catch fire.

PRODUCTS 1.7 million Quantum series ELM and ELM2 emergency-light fixtures sold nationwide and at Amazon.com and Grainger.com from March 2010 through February 2014 for \$35 to \$55. Lithonia has had 29 reports of circuit boards overheating and fixtures melting or catching fire, with one incident resulting in more than \$100,000 in damage.

WHAT TO DO Stop using the light. Contact Lithonia Lighting at 888-615-4501 or go to lithonia.com to order a free repair kit.

Stroller's wheel brakes disengage in our test

Double strollers are a lifesaver if you have two kids to carry.

Graco's Ready2Grow Classic Connect LX, \$210, can hold two different-sized children and let one sit while the other stands. But its brakes released in our test, raising a safety concern. We've judged the Graco Ready2Grow Classic Connect LX and similar Classic Connect, Click Connect LX, and Click Connect strollers a Don't Buy: Safety Risk as a result.

We put Graco's Ready2Grow Classic Connect LX stroller through the same brake test as other strollers, using a tilt-table we angle up to 20 degrees to stress the brake system. Of the more than 160 strollers, including other double strollers, that we put through the test, only this Graco rolled. The Graco's braking system includes plastic teeth that are supposed to lock the wheels; several of the teeth were bent and showed stress marks after our test.

We shared our findings with Graco and the Consumer Product Safety Commission. Graco told us that it strongly disagrees with our conclusion and challenged the real-world relevance of our braking test, given its steep, 20-degree incline. The company noted that the voluntary industry test uses a 12-degree incline. We believe our test measures whether strollers provide an extra margin of safety. By September 2015, all strollers must meet a new federal safety



Don't Buy: Safety Risk
Graco Ready2Grow Classic Connect LX stroller

standard that includes a test approximating the force applied to the brakes by a 20-degree incline.

Graco told us that there have been no brake-related injuries reported for the Ready2Grow Classic Connect LX, and we found none on record. The company also said it is upgrading the braking system as part of continuous improvement, and that the new system will meet the new safety standard. Meanwhile, if you own Graco's Ready2Grow Classic Connect LX or a similar model, consider asking the retailer for a refund. Graco (800-345-4109) also said it would help owners on a case-by-case basis. If you must use one of those strollers, be aware of the potential brake issue. A better bet: Graco's FastAction Fold Duo Click Connect, a CR Best Buy at \$280.

7.6 million

That's the number of vehicles covered under a new safety recall announced by General Motors in late June involving more than two dozen models from 1997 to 2014. GM says it knows of seven related crashes with three deaths. In those cases the crashes seem to be related to inadvertent ignition key rotation. See gm.com for details.

Remember 1978? Why 2014 is better.

Over the past three decades, products have gotten safer, shoppers wiser. Call it the Age of the Empowered Consumer.

FEELING NOSTALGIC for the good old days? Then think back to the late 1970s. Gas lines stretched for blocks at service stations thanks to a revolution in Iran and an energy crisis. Gas-guzzling cars were common: The midsize 1978 Oldsmobile Cutlass we tested got 11.8 mpg in city driving. Inflation sat at an uncomfortable 7.6 percent, compared with about 2 percent today.

The past 35 years have seen a revolution in consumer rights, protection, and choice. There has been an explosion in the variety of products available, the complexity of those products, and the speed with which they hit the shelves.

We picked 1978 as a landmark date because that was also the start of a new era at Consumer Reports; it was the year that our president, Jim Guest, joined the organization as a member of the board of directors. Now, as Guest prepares to retire from Consumer Reports after more than 35 years with the organization, including the last 13 as CR's president, we're looking back at how much things have changed for all of us.

CARS SQUEEZE OUT MORE GAS MILEAGE

Fuel efficiency. In 1978, the average price of a gallon of gasoline ranged from 65 cents to 71 cents (\$2.36 to \$2.58 in today's dollars), and half of all oil used in the country went for driving. Consumer Reports derided the government's fuel-efficiency numbers as "exaggerated figures achieved in static tests that don't accurately reproduce what happens in real driving." Cars that year had to meet government fuel-economy standards

of 18 mpg average over their fleet. But subcompacts weren't that impressive; a VW Rabbit diesel took 21.5 seconds to reach 60 mph. Standards increased to 27.5 mpg for 1985 cars but stayed there for many years. Consumer Reports pushed to set the bar higher, filing comments and testifying for more stringent requirements. In 2012, the government announced new standards that will require fleets to average 54.5 mpg by 2025.

Vehicle rollover. Sport-utility vehicles, or SUVs, have exploded in popularity over the past decades. But their higher center of gravity and dimensions also led to questions of stability in certain situations. Consumer Reports first petitioned the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) for a stability standard in 1988 to keep

rollover-prone vehicles off the market. But it wasn't until 2000 that Congress directed NHTSA to develop dynamic rollover tests, with major support from Consumer Reports. We testified about consumers' need for information based on dynamic rollover tests so that they could choose the safest SUVs, and we applauded the testing protocol that NHTSA announced in October 2003. Over the following years, we strongly pushed for mandatory electronic stability control, which dramatically reduces the risk of rollover in all vehicles, especially SUVs. Thanks in large part to our prodding, the agency required ESC starting with 2012 models.

Car seats. When CR started testing child safety seats in 1972, we rated 12 of the 15 models Not Acceptable. Partly in response to our



ENERGY CRISIS A gas shortage in the late 1970s spurred long lines and gave urgency to automakers to raise the fuel efficiency of the vehicles they produced.

findings then and in subsequent years, the government mandated that as of Jan. 1, 1981, manufacturers had to certify that their child safety seats would pass “a rigorous crash test.”

HEALTH REFORM BECOMES A REALITY

Health coverage. In 1978, Consumers Union asked then-president Jimmy Carter to move the country toward a national health insurance system. (It’s a message we have been sending for decades.) Now, 35 years later, health reform is up and running. To make the case in 2008, Consumer Reports outfitted a 32-foot RV, staffed it with three advocates, and logged miles in 47 states. That “Cover America Tour” documented consumers’ experiences as part of a larger effort to improve the quality, safety, and accessibility of health care, long a mission of Consumer Reports. The advocates covered 17,620 miles, speaking with thousands of ordinary people who had extraordinary stories about a failed system. And in 2010, the Affordable Care Act was signed into law, ensuring health care choice for millions of Americans who had previously been shut out of the market.

Hospital infections. As many as 440,000 Americans die each year as a result of preventable harm that happens while they’re hospitalized. And a significant portion of those deaths are the result of hospital-acquired infections. In 2003, our Safe Patient

Project began as a campaign to push hospitals to publicly report their infection rates, helped by the personal stories of consumers. Now, 32 states and the federal government require some level of disclosure.

Drug evaluations. Prescription drugs, supplements, and vitamins grab an astonishing share of consumers’ health dollars. In 1990 Consumer Reports wrote that despite a scandal over payoffs at the Food and Drug Administration, generic drugs were safe and effective, and could save half of the cost of brand-name versions. Our Best Buy Drugs project now helps millions of consumers save money and find the best medication for their condition.

LESS DANGER IN HOME AND YARD

Lawn mowers. Concerned about an estimated 161,000 people per year sustaining injuries, including amputations, because they came into contact with a moving blade, the Consumer Product Safety Commission selected Consumers Union to develop a new safety standard for lawn mowers. Among the features recommended by CU that became mandatory under the final standard was a “dead-man control” that must be held down to allow the blade to turn and that will, when released, stop the blade within 3 seconds. In 1983, despite almost a decade of opposition by the outdoor power equipment industry, consumers were finally able

to buy lawn mowers with the new features.

Appliance efficiency. In 1975, Congress ordered the Department of Energy to set mandatory standards for energy use by major household appliances. But the DOE refused, saying standards wouldn’t be economically justified or result in a “significant” energy savings. It took 10 more years, and a lawsuit from Consumer Reports and others, before a federal court decision in 1985 that said, just do it. Almost 30 years later, evolving energy standards have brought significantly more efficient washers, dishwashers, air conditioners, and refrigerators.


Kerosene heaters. Consumers Union alerted the CPSC in 1982 that unvented kerosene heaters were inherently dangerous because of their “potential both as a fire hazard and as a source of indoor air pollution” and asked that the CPSC re-evaluate their safety. The agency’s investigation led to the same conclusion, and the industry trade association agreed to implement safety features based on our recommendations.

THE PHONE AND COMPUTER REVOLUTIONS

Deregulation. In 1978, the telecommunications revolution was just beginning. AT&T and the Bell system rented equipment and sold services to more than 80 percent of the country’s telephone users, perhaps because incentive programs spurred representatives to oversell. Our secret shoppers called

PHONE: COMPUTER AND FLIGHT ATTENDANT: GETTY IMAGES; LAWN MOWER: MASTERFILE

Announcing a very supreme Cutlass.
It’s a special edition,
’78 Oldsmobile Cutlass Supreme.



Dual sport mirrors color keyed to the accent paint.

Special paint treatment: White with choice of Carmine, Camel, Blue, or Green.

Super stock wheels

LOOKING BACK
The past three decades have seen many changes for consumers. Cars such as the Oldsmobile Cutlass didn’t get great gas mileage. Mowers in the 1970s lacked safe discharge chutes and dead-man safety controls. Rented telecom equipment such as AT&T’s Princess phone was commonplace, computers became consumer items, and airline deregulation changed the way we fly.



36 representatives across the country and asked them what to get for a one-room apartment; some were honest, others said that we needed to rent three push-button (extra cost) Trimline (extra cost) phones. When buying equipment started to become an option, we provided a cost comparison to help consumers decide whether to rent or buy.

Computers. Consumers were overwhelmed with the many choices they faced in shopping for a computer. We showed them how to assemble a system for less than \$1,000, a far cry from the steep \$3,000 (\$6,033 in today's dollars) cost of a high-end IBM-compatible model.

Cell-phone number portability. Once upon a time, cell-phone users forfeited their number when they switched to a new carrier. It was such a hassle that people tended to stick with a carrier, despite lousy service. Through our "Escape Cell Hell" campaign, consumers sent more than 22,000 letters to Congress urging it to pass number portability. It became a reality in 2003.

SOUNDING ALARMS ON FOOD SAFETY

Chicken testing. Our 1978 tests found that up to half were contaminated with human or animal fecal matter, and many tested positive for E. coli and salmonella. Our tests through the years also found campylobacter. We lobbied the government for limits on that bacteria; they were finally set in 2010.

Not all is rosy. Our February 2014 test results still turned up fecal contaminants. Also present: bacteria that were resistant to antibiotics.

Arsenic in food. Tests of apple and grape juices in 2011 found that contamination from arsenic was at worrisome levels, with no federal limits to govern it. Our tests have also turned up inorganic arsenic at troublesome levels in other foods, including rice. Consumer Reports experts urged the Food and Drug Administration to set standards for those foods, and in July 2013 the agency announced its proposal to limit the amount of arsenic in apple juice.

MORE MONEY CHOICES

Airline deregulation. A round-trip "Super-Apex" fare from NYC to London in 1979 was \$1,401 in today's dollars. You had to book at least 21 days in advance and stay seven to 180 days. Airline deregulation changed the way carriers could set fares, pick up or drop routes, and treat bumped passengers.

Financial oversight. The financial crisis of 2008 brought hardship to consumers and a hard line from Consumer Reports. In his December magazine column, Jim Guest said, "We're not promoting needless regulation; we're calling for astute analysis, increased assessment of risk, and reasonable regulatory oversight." We supported the creation of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, established in 2010.

A leading man

Jim Guest says that soon after he joined the board of Consumer Reports in 1978, "survival was our biggest challenge." The organization's financial reserves were frighteningly low, and its future uncertain. When he became president in 2001, he made changes that expanded our impact in the marketplace and led to major growth. What he didn't change was a commitment to Consumer Reports' core values, including independence and a strict ban on donations from industry.

Health care reform was one of Guest's top priorities. He led the organization's efforts to get pro-consumer provisions in the Affordable Care Act and, by enlisting consumers, put human faces on an otherwise faceless political battle. Consumer Reports, Guest wrote, "believes that the debate over health care must have at its heart the needs of consumers."

Consumers' finances were every bit as important to Guest, who led the organization's fight for transparency and fair practices in credit cards, bank accounts, and mortgages. "Consumers cannot possibly be good marshals of their own money without a clear picture of the full costs and benefits of financial products," he wrote. "We need regulation because an unregulated industry has failed to be straight with customers."

In 2007 and 2008, millions of toys and children's products were recalled for excessive lead and other hazards. Consumer Reports strongly supported—and helped develop—a law that lowered lead limits, set mandatory standards for infant products, and created a database where consumers could report and research safety concerns. Guest called it "a problem that should have been resolved decades ago."



How to pick a medical alert system

YOU'VE PROBABLY SEEN the ads on TV and in magazines—especially that iconic “I’ve fallen, and I can’t get up” commercial that, yes, is still running. The makers of medical alert systems promise swift help in the event that you have a medical emergency while home alone, whether it’s a fall or symptoms of a heart attack, stroke, or seizure. The ads are reaching a receptive audience: Sales of med-alert services are growing and expected to continue doing so as the baby boom generation ages.

Should you consider buying one, for either yourself or an aging parent who spends time alone? Here’s a quick guide on what the systems offer and what to look for when you shop:

Make the most of technology

Medical alert systems were introduced in the 1970s as simple push-button devices worn around the neck. They summoned help by signaling a base station connected to a home phone line that would alert a call-center operator. Today’s systems are still wearable, but you can also mount help

buttons throughout the home that allow for two-way voice communication with call centers. Some offer motion-sensitive pendants that can detect a fall and automatically place a call for help.

Who needs one? Most buyers purchase a system for an aging parent who lives alone so that they can get help quickly if needed. That person might be at a heightened risk for falls because of poor eyesight or memory changes, says Barbara Resnick, Ph.D., professor of nursing at the University of Maryland and past president of the American Geriatrics Society. The systems can also be useful in nonemergency situations where the user doesn’t need an ambulance but does need someone to come to their aid. The call center will alert a preselected relative or friend who can come over and assist.

What to look for

If you’re in the market for a medical alert system, the experts we consulted said the best ones meet all or most of the following criteria:

- It works for a user’s specific disability. For

example, a stroke survivor may need a device he or she can activate with one hand.

- It offers a choice of a wristband and/or neck pendant. Cords worn around the neck can pose a strangulation risk; wristbands might irritate people with skin conditions.
- It includes help buttons that can be wall-mounted near the floor in multiple rooms in case the user falls and isn’t wearing the pendant.
- It offers multiple choices for whom to contact if you need help, from emergency services to a friend or relative who lives nearby.
- It has a battery backup in case of a power failure.
- The base station can be contacted from anywhere on your property—even in the yard or at your mailbox.
- The company has its own monitoring center, located in the U.S., and employs its own trained emergency operators (rather than contracting that function out).
- The monitoring center has been certified by Underwriters Laboratories (UL), a non-profit safety and consulting company.

Your shopping guide to services

All listed systems offer daily 24-hour monitoring and put two operators on each call. (One contacts emergency services; the other stays on the line with you.) All come with a waterproof neck pendant and wristband with battery backup. Ask for quotes in writing because prices and services may change.



Facts to consider

	Life Alert 800-494-9394 lifealert.com	LifeStation 877-288-4962 lifestation.com	Medical Alert 800-800-2537 medicalalert.com	MobileHelp 800-992-0616 mobilehelpnow.com	Philips Lifeline 855-214-1363 lifelinesys.com	Rescue Alert 800-688-9576 rescuealert.com
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MONTHLY SERVICE COST

	Landline/cellular	GPS mobile ¹
	\$30/\$40	\$20
	\$26/\$33	not available
	\$30/\$35	\$40
	not available/\$35	\$42
	\$30/\$42	not available
	\$30/\$43	not available

FEATURES

	Range (in feet)	Mobile 911 phone ²	Automatic fall detection ³
	300	yes	no
	500	yes	no
	600	yes	yes
	350 to 600	no	yes
	400 to 600	no	yes
	600	yes	no

FEES

	Minimum obligation	Activation	Cancellation
	36 months ⁴	\$95	\$90
	30 days	none	none
	90 days	none	none
	none	none	none
	none	\$20 to \$60	none
	none	none	\$0 to \$25 ⁵

MONITORING SERVICES

	In-house or outsourced	UL-listed (or comparable)
	in-house	yes
	in-house	yes
	outsourced	yes
	outsourced	yes
	in-house	no
	in-house	yes ⁶

¹ Works when you are traveling away from home. ² Places a call to local 911 services if you’re out of your normal service range. Carries an additional fee. ³ Charges extra for this service. Companies say systems cannot detect 100 percent of falls. ⁴ If user dies, contract is void. ⁵ Depends on payment plan. ⁶ Certified by ETL, a standards-testing organization.

Your check is ready for its close-up

One drawback to mobile deposits:
Your funds could be delayed

IF YOU THOUGHT depositing checks into your bank account would never be anything other than a mundane but mandatory chore, perhaps you haven't heard of remote deposit capture.

Use your mobile banking app and smart-phone camera to snap a picture of the front and back of a paper check, then electronically and securely deposit it into your account. You save time and hassles by not traveling to a bank branch and not waiting in a teller line.

More than 75 million U.S. consumers use their smart phones for mobile banking. But only 38 percent have tried depositing by cell phone in the past year, according to the most recent Federal Reserve survey. Not all banks offer the service, introduced by USAA Federal Savings Bank in 2009, but laggards are now scrambling to provide it. Frank Aloï, president of Ath Power Consulting, a financial-services-industry research firm based in Boston, says it's the feature most desired by mobile-banking-app customers.

But before you point and shoot, beware of some potential pitfalls, especially where personal checks are concerned.

Delayed funds availability

Federal regulations dictate how long banks can hold checks before making the funds available—and it isn't very long. In general, the first \$200 of a deposit must be available for cash withdrawal or check writing the next business day. The rest should be available on the second day for check-writing purposes and on the third for cash withdrawal, subject to certain exceptions and other details.

But the regulations were written before the advent of mobile banking and don't include it, creating a loophole big enough for certain banks to drive an armored car through.

For example, GoBank, a virtual bank whose customers access their accounts almost entirely via personal computer and

smart phone, holds funds from personal checks hostage for up to 10 days. GoBank has no branches, and its nationwide network of 42,000 fee-free ATMs doesn't accept deposits, so remote deposit is the only way to get checks into a GoBank account.

Your account agreement generally governs this outside-the-regulations issue, and banks' voluntary rules aren't always anti-consumer. Many, including Chase, Citi, PNC, TD Bank, and U.S. Bank, as well as the virtual banks Ally and Simple, make funds available according to the standard regulations or better. TD Bank, for example, generally releases funds the first business day after deposit.

Certain banks place longer holds. BB&T generally makes remote deposit funds available within three business days. American Express Bluebird, a virtual checking account, holds funds until the sixth business day after

deposit. Because that unavoidably stretches over a weekend's two nonbusiness days, the AmEx delay amounts to more than a one-calendar-week hold.

Avoid other gotchas

After you make your smart-phone deposit, hang onto the paper check for two weeks in case a problem arises. Date and mark it as a mobile deposit so that you or your significant other doesn't mistakenly deposit it again and incur returned-deposit fees. Shred or otherwise completely destroy the paper check (don't recycle it) so that a crook can't use it.

Remote-deposit fees appear to be uncommon, but at least one big institution, U.S. Bank, charges 50 cents per check. That's outrageous because digital deposits can be cheaper for banks to process than paper ones.



Get your money sooner

- Ask your bank when funds from a remote check deposit will be available.** If the smart-phone deposit hold is longer than usual and you need the funds now, deposit the check using a teller or an ATM; if you use a virtual bank and prefer that type, consider switching to Ally or Simple.
- Use direct deposit.** Have your paycheck, Social Security benefits, and other income electronically direct-deposited to your account instead of receiving paper checks that must then be deposited. Direct-deposit funds must be available to you the next business day after the bank receives them, and many institutions release them the day they're received.
- Avoid delays.** Cutoff times for deposit, say 5 p.m., bump your "day of deposit" to the next business day, which means the funds-availability clock doesn't start till then. So don't put off deposits until late in the day. And, of course, weekends and holidays don't count as business days.

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DEADLY PAIN PILLS

Every day, 46 people
in the U.S. die from legal
pain pills. Here's how
to avoid being a statistic.

AMERICA IS IN PAIN—and being killed by its painkillers.

It starts with drugs such as OxyContin, Percocet, and Vicodin—prescription narcotics that can make days bearable if you are recovering from surgery or suffering from cancer. But they can be as addictive as heroin and are rife with deadly side effects.

Use of those and other opioids has skyrocketed in recent years. Prescriptions have climbed 300 percent in the past decade, and Vicodin and other drugs containing the narcotic hydrocodone are now the most commonly prescribed medications in the U.S. With that increased use have come increased deaths: 46 people per day, or almost 17,000 people per year, die from overdoses of the drugs. That's up more than 400 percent from 1999. And for every death, more than 30 people are admitted to the emergency room because of opioid complications.

With numbers like that, you would think that the Food and Drug Administration would do all it could to reverse the trend. But against the recommendation of its own panel of expert advisers, last December the agency approved Zohydro ER, a long-acting version

of hydrocodone. “We think the benefits of the drug outweigh its risks,” says Douglas Throckmorton, M.D., who oversees regulation of drugs for the FDA. He says that Zohydro ER offers an option to some people in pain, and that the FDA has taken steps to make all opioids safer by, for example, requiring stronger warnings on drug labels. The FDA says it will also keep a close eye on how Zohydro ER is used in the marketplace.

But attorneys general from 28 states have asked the FDA to reconsider its decision because the drug offers no clear advantages over others already on the market and its potency makes it a target for misuse and abuse. And more than a dozen Republican and Democratic members of Congress have signed a bill that would ban Zohydro ER.

Opioids aren't the only painkillers that pose serious risks. Almost as dangerous is a medication renowned for its safety: acetaminophen (Tylenol and generic). Almost 80,000 people per year are treated in emergency rooms because they have taken too much of it, and the drug is now the most common cause of liver failure in this country.

Though some of those tragedies stem from abuse, many are accidental. It's not just that

people are careless. Advice to “take only as directed” doesn't cut it when the advice is confusing and conflicting. And with acetaminophen, the advice is exactly that. For example, the FDA has lowered the maximum per-pill dose of prescription acetaminophen, but it hasn't taken the same step for over-the-counter products. And OTC drug-makers have wildly different notions of what people can take: Some labels advise taking no more than 1,000 milligrams of acetaminophen daily; others set the limit almost four times as high.

And with acetaminophen, accidentally taking too much is all too easy. That's because it's the most common drug in the U.S., found as an ingredient in more than 600 OTC and prescription medications, including allergy aids, cough and cold remedies, fever reducers, pain relievers, and sleep aids.

“All of this doesn't mean that everyone should avoid opioids and acetaminophen altogether,” says Marvin M. Lipman, M.D., chief medical adviser for Consumer Reports. “But it does mean that the FDA should fulfill its role to protect consumers by taking strong steps to reduce the dangers, starting by reconsidering its approval of Zohydro ER

and finally establishing consistent standards for acetaminophen.”

It also means you need to know the risks, not only of opioids and acetaminophen but also of drugs such as ibuprofen (Advil and generic), naproxen (Aleve and generic), and Celebrex. That last drug, now prescribed only under its brand name, should be available in the next year or so as a lower-cost generic called celecoxib. But like its nonprescription cousins, it poses serious risks to your heart and stomach when taken regularly, as millions of Americans do.

“Pain drugs can be as bad as the pain itself,” Lipman says. “So you need to know when they are really needed and how to use them safely.”

OPIOIDS

Deadly misconceptions

One of the biggest misconceptions people have about opioids is that the risks apply to other people, not themselves. But the “typical” victim of overdose might not be whom you think. About 60 percent of overdoses occur in people prescribed the drugs by a single physician, not in those who “doctor shopped” or got them on the black market. And a third of those were taking a low dose.

Used properly, opioids can ease severe short-term pain from, say, surgery or a broken bone, and manage chronic pain from an illness such as cancer. But people run into trouble when they inadvertently misuse the drugs—combining them with alcohol or other drugs (such as sleeping pills), taking them in too high a dose or for too long, or using them while driving or in other situations when they need to be alert.

Ideally, health care professionals should act as gatekeepers, prescribing painkillers only when they’re appropriate and monitoring patients for side effects. But that’s not always done, says Richard Blondell, M.D., director of the National Center for Addiction Training at the State University of New York in Buffalo, N.Y. “No doubt, the public needs to be better educated about the risks,” Blondell says. “But ultimately this epidemic starts with the doctor’s prescription pad.”

The general public and health care providers harbor outdated and dangerous notions about opioids. Below are three of the biggest misconceptions and the facts you need to know to stay safe:

Misconception: Opioids work well for chronic pain. An estimated 90 percent of people suffering long-term pain wind up being prescribed an opioid despite little evidence that the drugs help much or are safe when used long-term. “But we do know that

the higher the dose and the longer you take it, the greater your risk,” says Gary Franklin, M.D., research professor of environmental and occupational health sciences at the University of Washington in Seattle. People who take opioids for more than a few weeks often develop tolerance, so they require higher doses, which in turn breeds dependence. And although higher doses can ease pain, they commonly cause nausea and constipation, disrupt your immune system and sex life, and leave you feeling too fuzzy-headed to participate in things such as physical activity that can speed your recovery. And in a cruel twist, the drugs can make some people more sensitive to pain.

The safer approach. For certain types of pain—including nerve pain, migraines, and fibromyalgia—other prescription medications usually work better than opioids. For other types of chronic pain, ask your doctor about trying OTC drugs such as acetaminophen, ibuprofen, and naproxen before prescription drugs. Nondrug measures such as exercise, massage, behavioral therapy, and acupuncture might also help. If you have chronic pain that hasn’t responded to other treatment, opioids may be an option. But your doctor should prescribe the lowest effective dose for the shortest possible time and monitor you for side effects.

Misconception: Opioids are not addictive when used to treat pain. “That’s what I and a lot of other doctors learned in medical school,” Blondell says. “But we now know that’s just not true.” Somewhere between

5 percent and 25 percent of people who use prescription pain pills long term get addicted. Fewer women are dependent on prescription painkillers than men, but they may become dependent more quickly and are more likely to doctor shop.

The safer approach. Chronic pain often waxes and wanes. If you and your doctor feel you need an opioid, reserve it for flare-ups. If you take it for more than a few weeks, your doctor should advise you about early signs of addiction, including unusual moodiness, cravings, temper flare-ups, and taking unnecessary risks.

Misconception: Extended-release versions are safer. Opioids such as hydromorphone (Exalgo), oxycodone (OxyContin and generic), morphine (Avinza, MS Contin, and generic), and the newly approved Zohydro ER stay in the body longer and are usually stronger than short-acting forms. They should be reserved for patients who need round-the-clock relief. But doctors sometimes prescribe them for convenience—patients need to take fewer pills—and because they believe that long-acting drugs are less likely to cause a drug “high” and lead to addiction. But there’s no evidence those drugs work better or are safer than short-acting ones. And people dependent on opioids seek out the higher potency of long-acting versions. That’s why public health groups and law-enforcement agencies fear that the new Zohydro ER is prone to abuse.

The safer approach. It’s usually best to start with a short-acting opioid. Because

It’s easy to overdose on acetaminophen

Acetaminophen is in many products, making it easy to get more than the 4,000 milligrams per day linked to liver damage and the 3,250-milligram daily maximum we recommend.



Tylenol Extra Strength

CONTAINS
500 milligrams of acetaminophen per pill.

DIRECTIONS
Take no more than six pills in 24 hours.

MAXIMUM DAILY DOSE
3,000 milligrams.



NyQuil Cold & Flu

CONTAINS
325 milligrams of acetaminophen per pill (plus dextromethorphan and doxylamine for cold and flu symptoms).

DIRECTIONS
Take no more than eight pills in 24 hours.

MAXIMUM DAILY DOSE
2,600 milligrams.



Walgreens Pain Reliever PM

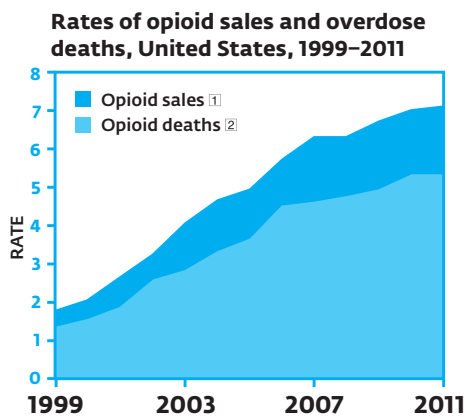
CONTAINS
500 milligrams of acetaminophen per pill (plus diphenhydramine as a sleep aid).

DIRECTIONS
Take two pills at bedtime.

MAXIMUM DAILY DOSE
1,000 milligrams.



TOTAL
acetaminophen
within a
24-hour period:
6,600 mg



① In kilograms per 10,000 people. ② Per 100,000 people. Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

long-acting drugs are more likely to be stolen, misused, and abused, if your doctor prescribes one, expect careful monitoring.

ACETAMINOPHEN Dangerous doses

When taken at recommended doses, acetaminophen is safe for pain relief for most people, even when used long term. But there's little margin for error. Exceeding the maximum recommended dose—by even a little bit—can prove toxic, especially to the liver. And as the box on the facing page shows, it's easy to do.

It has long been known that large doses of acetaminophen taken at once can be fatal. But cumulative smaller doses totaling more than 4,000 milligrams (eight 500-milligram, or "extra strength," pills) can be just as

dangerous, if not more so. People who took repeat doses of the medication—for complaints such as headaches, muscle pain, and toothaches—that put them over the maximum daily amount were more likely to have brain, kidney, and liver problems, and faced a greater risk of dying or needing a liver transplant than people who had taken a single, large overdose. That's according to a 16-year Scottish study of people treated in the emergency room published in 2011.

That same year, the FDA tried to reduce acetaminophen poisonings by limiting the prescription products to 325 milligrams per pill. The agency noted that higher doses don't relieve pain better and that people are more likely to overdose on them.

But the agency has not yet imposed the same limits for nonprescription products, even though they account for 80 percent of the acetaminophen taken in the U.S. No doubt, that pleased OTC drugmakers: "Extra strength" products with 500 milligrams of acetaminophen per pill are big sellers.

And because acetaminophen shows up in so many products, you need to check all drug labels for acetaminophen. Then make sure you stay below the safe upper limit when you combine the pills. And you should avoid acetaminophen altogether if you are at risk for liver disease or drink alcohol heavily, because that multiplies the dangers. If you regularly take the drug, watch for signs of liver damage, including dark urine, pale stools, upper-right abdominal pain, and a yellowish tinge to the whites of the eyes.

Safe opioid use

What are opioids? They're the strongest pain medications, available only with a prescription. Common brand names include OxyContin, Percocet, Vicodin, and Zohydro ER. Generics include fentanyl, hydrocodone, morphine, and oxycodone.

Read the label. Never take more than advised, don't take with alcohol, and don't combine with any other drug without your doctor's OK. Most opioid deaths involve alcohol or sleeping pills.

Get tested for sleep apnea. If you snore loudly, get checked for the condition, because opioids can make it worse or even fatal.

Tell your doctor if you have a cold, an asthma flare-up, or bronchitis because opioids can interfere with breathing. You may need a lower dose until you recover.

Don't drive or do anything that requires you to be fully alert, especially when you start taking an opioid or whenever you change the type or dosage.

Lock up opioids. "Keeping opioids around is like keeping a loaded gun in your medicine cabinet," says Richard Blondell, M.D., whose research shows that most teens hooked on prescription painkillers started with medication they got from their own house or from a friend.

Expect regular monitoring. If you are taking the drugs for chronic pain, "your doctor should assess you at regular visits. If pain and function do not improve at least 30 percent after starting the drugs, then they probably are not working well enough to justify the risks," says Gary Franklin, M.D. Your doctor should also make sure that you take the drugs as prescribed by, for example, counting your pills.

Discard unused pills. You may be able to give them back to your pharmacy. If you can't, the FDA says, unlike other drugs, opioids are so risky excess pills should be flushed down the toilet.



Should I ask my doctor for Celebrex?

In most cases, no—for several reasons. First, the drug, which in generic form is known as celecoxib, doesn't ease pain from osteoarthritis better than related drugs available without a prescription, including ibuprofen (Advil and generic) and naproxen (Aleve and generic), according to our Best Buy Drugs analysis. And though some research suggests that celecoxib is less likely to cause stomach bleeding, it might be more likely than naproxen to increase the risk of heart attacks and strokes.

In addition, though celecoxib should be available next year as a generic and will eventually cost less than the brand-name original, it can take a year or more for savings to trickle down to consumers. We estimate that a year after it becomes available as a generic, celecoxib will cost about \$70 per month. That's roughly half of what brand-name Celebrex now costs—but about seven times as much as what generic ibuprofen or naproxen costs.

Because of the risks posed by those drugs, we suggest that most people with arthritis start with appropriate doses of acetaminophen, which is safer when used properly. That's especially true for people who have a history of ulcers, bleeding, kidney disease, or any form of cardiovascular disease.

ConsumerReports BEST BUY DRUGS™

For details on the safe use of pain medications, go to CRBestBuyDrugs.org/painpills. CR Best Buy Drugs is a free Consumer Reports project.

Got pain? Try these drugs ... and try these nondrug measures, too

For many minor ailments, an over-the-counter drug might be all you need. Acetaminophen (Tylenol and generic), aspirin, ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin IB, and generic), and naproxen (Aleve and generic) are generally safe for occasional use when used appropriately. We recommend OTC generic and store-brand versions because they are cheaper than and just as safe and effective as their brand-name versions.

BACK PAIN

TRY THIS FIRST

Any over-the-counter pain reliever, such as acetaminophen, aspirin, ibuprofen, or naproxen.

IF THAT DOESN'T WORK

If after 10 days or so you still have pain, you could talk with your doctor about a muscle relaxant. Our Best Buy Drugs top pick for those drugs is generic cyclobenzaprine. But those drugs have risks that include addiction, sedation, fatigue, and dizziness. And our analysis shows that they don't work any better than OTC acetaminophen, aspirin, ibuprofen, or naproxen. And skip opioids. They don't work any better for back pain and pose serious risks.

NONDRUG

OPTIONS Staying physically active is the single most important thing you can do to treat back pain, with or without drugs. Acupuncture, massage, Pilates, tai chi, physical therapy, and yoga might also help some people, research suggests.

HEAD-ACHES

TRY THIS FIRST

For run-of-the-mill headaches, including tension headaches, try appropriate doses of acetaminophen. Ibuprofen and naproxen are OK, too—if you don't use them too often.

IF THAT DOESN'T WORK

You might have a migraine headache. If it is mild, consider a product that combines acetaminophen, aspirin, and caffeine (such as Excedrin Extra Strength). But if you suffer from more severe migraines or have them more than twice per month, you might need a prescription drug called a triptan, such as sumatriptan. Because triptans increase the risk of heart attack and stroke, use them cautiously.

NONDRUG

OPTIONS Cutting back on alcohol and avoiding foods that set off your headaches might help, as can exercise and controlling stress with meditation, relaxation therapy, or other means. Avoid overusing over-the-counter drugs; that can cause rebound headaches.

JOINT PAIN

TRY THIS FIRST

Ibuprofen and naproxen usually work better than acetaminophen because they ease inflammation, which often accompanies joint pain caused by osteoarthritis. But taking them long term can cause serious stomach and bleeding problems, so limit their use as much as possible, or consider appropriate doses of acetaminophen.

IF THAT DOESN'T WORK

Ask your doctor about a higher-dose, prescription-strength version of ibuprofen or a related drug, but get monitored because the higher the dose, the greater the risk of stomach bleeding.

NONDRUG

OPTIONS Regular low-impact exercises, such as walking or yoga, and stretching are best and can eliminate or sharply reduce your need to take medicine.

SORE MUSCLES

TRY THIS FIRST

Ibuprofen or naproxen can tame the inflammation that follows an afternoon of tennis or your first jog in a while.

IF THAT DOESN'T WORK

You could try over-the-counter pain-relief creams containing camphor, capsaicin, menthol, or methyl salicylate, or prescription-strength ones, though there is not much evidence about how well they work. And never combine them with heating pads.

NONDRUG

OPTIONS Apply ice immediately (but not directly on your skin) for up to 20 minutes, three to four times per day, after an acute injury. That will reduce blood flow, swelling, and inflammation. Also rest and elevate the affected area. After 24 to 48 hours, if inflammation has subsided, switch to heat, which helps relax muscles and improves healing circulation.

HEY, FDA!

People need more protection from pain relievers

Yes, we are talking to you, FDA. The pain-reliever marketplace is confusing and even dangerous for consumers. A few steps on your part could save thousands of lives each year.

Reconsider your approval of Zohydro ER.

In an 11-to-2 vote, your own advisory panel urged you to reject the drug because of its potential for abuse. And your sister agency, the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, says opioid addiction is a leading health care problem. Zohydro ER does not fill a pressing medical need; similar drugs are available. Addiction experts fear it will just fill a void for street narcotics. Sales of OxyContin (oxycodone) took a hit when drugmaker Purdue Pharma reformulated the pills to make it more difficult for people to crush them and snort the powder or dissolve and inject it. Zohydro ER now has no such safeguards. At least require its manufacturer, Zogenix, to make the drug difficult to abuse and require training for doctors who dispense it. And you should raise the bar for how you approve narcotic pain drugs.

Make acetaminophen standards consistent.

A per-pill dose of 325 milligrams is just as effective as stronger doses, and safer. That's the limit you set for prescription acetaminophen. So why not the same for OTC drugs, which account for 80 percent of acetaminophen use? We'd also like consistent drug labels. We found recommendations varying from 1,000 milligrams per day in some nighttime pain relievers to 3,900 milligrams in some products that combine acetaminophen with allergy drugs or cold and flu drugs. We think the labeled daily limit should be no more than 3,250 milligrams.

Consumers, you can help, too.

Contact the FDA at 888-463-6332 or at druginfo@fda.hhs.gov and let it know you want stricter standards on pain pills. Have you been harmed by opioids or acetaminophen? Share your story with us at ConsumerReports.org/paindrugs. Learn about our Safe Patient Project (SafePatientProject.org), which works with advocates to make health care safer.



How to free your closets and attic of unwanted treasures and make more money than you expect










TODD SIGETY, AN ANTIQUES APPRAISER in Alexandria, Va., recently got a call from a woman who wanted him to look through the contents of a storage unit that belonged to her late aunt. “She didn’t think there was anything worth keeping but wanted to make sure before she threw stuff out,” he says. Sure enough, there wasn’t much of value—except for one painting. After a little research Sigety realized it

was the work of a well-known South American artist; Christie’s will auction it this fall. The presale estimated value: \$30,000 to \$50,000. Of course, you may not have a masterwork, or even a minor work, hiding in a storage unit. But your basement and attic may be bursting with possessions you no longer want, and you might be surprised by the amount you can pocket if you sell them. “I find people can easily make \$1,000 to \$2,000 when they sell their

How to decide where to sell your stuff

This chart will help you decide which venue makes the most sense, depending on the type of goods you plan to sell and their condition. First, you'll want to determine whether you have any items that are valuable—say, worth \$1,000 or more. If you're not sure, you can look

for similar objects in reference books or on websites for collectors. For example, if you think a piece of furniture might be a somewhat valuable antique, check out "Antique Trader Antiques & Collectibles 2014 Price Guide" (Krause Publications, 2013). You can also find a price guide to

Item	Value	Condition	Get appraisal
 Furniture Including antiques, draperies, rugs	Valuable	Excellent	✓
		Good	
	Not valuable	Excellent	
		Good	
 Artwork Including pottery and crafts	Valuable	Excellent	✓
		Good	✓
	Not valuable	Excellent	
		Good	
 Sports and exercise gear From bats and balls to treadmills	Valuable	Excellent	
		Good	
	Not valuable	Excellent	
		Good	
 Clothing Vintage, new, and used but in good condition	Valuable	Excellent	✓
		Good	
	Not valuable	Excellent	
		Good	
 Musical instruments And their accessories	Valuable	Excellent	
		Good	
	Not valuable	Excellent	
		Good	
 Collectibles Stamps, coins, autographs, etc.	Valuable	Excellent	✓
		Good	
	Not valuable	Excellent	
		Good	
 Jewelry Including watches	Valuable	Excellent	✓
		Good	✓
	Not valuable	Excellent	
		Good	
 Electronics and appliances From late models to old ones (for parts)	Valuable	Excellent	
		Good	
	Not valuable	Excellent	
		Good	
 Housewares China, silver, cookware, etc.	Valuable	Excellent	✓
		Good	
	Not valuable	Excellent	
		Good	

more than 900,000 antiques and collectibles at Kovels.com. If you determine it might be a valuable object, it's probably a good idea to have it appraised. (For more on appraisals, see the box on page 28.)

TRY THESE PLACES — IN THIS ORDER

Auction house	Consignment	Online	Yard sale	Donate (last option)
FIRST	SECOND	THIRD		
	FIRST	SECOND	THIRD	
	FIRST		SECOND	
			FIRST	
FIRST	SECOND	THIRD		
	FIRST	SECOND		
	FIRST	SECOND	THIRD	
		FIRST	SECOND	
	FIRST	SECOND		
		FIRST	SECOND	
		FIRST	SECOND	
			FIRST	
FIRST	SECOND			
	FIRST	SECOND		
	FIRST	SECOND		
			FIRST	
FIRST	SECOND	THIRD		
	FIRST	SECOND		
		FIRST	SECOND	
		FIRST	SECOND	
FIRST	SECOND	THIRD		
	FIRST	SECOND		
		FIRST	SECOND	
			FIRST	
FIRST	SECOND	THIRD		
	FIRST	SECOND		
		FIRST	SECOND	
			FIRST	
	FIRST	SECOND		
		FIRST	SECOND	
		FIRST	SECOND	
FIRST	SECOND	THIRD		
	FIRST	SECOND		
		FIRST	SECOND	
			FIRST	

unwanted stuff,” says Carolyn Schneider, author of “The Ultimate Consignment & Thrift Store Guide” (iUniverse, 2012). You’ll be helping both the environment—your things won’t end up in a landfill—and your bottom line.

You’ll make the most money by matching your goods with the best places to sell them, whether it’s an auction house, a consignment store, a website, or a yard sale. Just keep in mind that the IRS may want a cut of your profits. It taxes the proceeds from the sale of collectibles as capital gains, generally at a rate of 28 percent. Under IRS regulations, collectibles include works of art, rugs, antiques, metals (such as gold, silver, and platinum bullion), gems, stamps, and coins. Your profit or loss is the difference between the basis, usually your purchase price, and the sale price. If you end up selling your goods at a yard sale, however, it will likely be for much less than you paid for them, so you probably won’t owe any tax.

AUCTION HOUSES

You’re probably familiar with well-known auction houses such as Christie’s and Sotheby’s, which sell fine artwork and rare antiques for millions of dollars. But there are lots of regional auction houses across the country that will handle less rarefied goods.

In the past couple of years, many of those spots have started simulcasting their proceedings online. Live auction attendees bid against online bidders in real time. Expanding the buyer base in that way often produces additional revenue for sellers, says Tim Luke, an auctioneer and the president of Treasure-Quest Appraisal Group in Hobe Sound, Fla., and a former director of the collectibles department at Christie’s in New York.

A local auctioneer can give you an idea of what he or she thinks an item you own will sell for at auction. You can locate an auctioneer and auction houses in your area by clicking on the “Find an auctioneer” button on the home page of the National Auctioneers Association website, at auctioneers.org. The group’s more than 5,000 nationwide members must adhere to its code of ethics.

Sell what’s in demand

You’ll probably get the highest price for a bona fide antique or a collectible in mint condition by selling it at auction.

Maximize your return

Document your stuff. Take a few photographs of the possessions you want to auction and write detailed descriptions that you can share with potential auctioneers. For

example, if you have an antique chest, include the furniture maker's name and the date and amount paid for it. Be sure to mention (and capture in photos) any restoration or repairs.

Attend a few sales. "I always suggest that people go to some auctions to see what different houses specialize in and to see which ones pull in a good crowd," says Luke. While you're there, ask the auctioneer how sales are promoted (online, in newspapers, and via e-mail is best) and whether they are simulcast online. Also, find out what the house's "sell-through" rate is, which is the percent of sales that are actually completed. A good rate is about 75 to 80 percent, says Luke.

Negotiate fees. In general, you'll pay a sales commission equal to 20 to 50 percent of the sale price. If your sale totals less than \$300, you're more likely to pay that 50 percent; more expensive items are charged lower commissions. But fees are negotiable and often depend on how much an auctioneer wants to sell your goods. If he won't budge on commission, he might be willing to pay to pack and ship your items to the auction house at no additional charge. You should get a contract that lists all of your costs, including fees.

Make sure your items are insured. See whether the auction house will cover your belongings in the event of loss, theft, or damage while it holds them. If not, check to see whether your homeowners insurance will cover them.

Use reserves sparingly. Ask in advance about the rules for setting a reserve price,

below which you will not sell, and get the policy in writing. If your item fails to sell, some auction houses might charge you a fee of about 5 to 15 percent of the reserve price.

Find out when you'll get paid. Auction houses wait until buyers' payments clear before they pay sellers. Some will send you a check after 30 days, or it might be 45.

CONSIGNMENT SHOPS

Many stores now have an online presence, so more shoppers can see your items. There are also some consignment stores that exist solely online.

Sell what's in demand

Shop owners generally want top-quality furniture, and some take only antiques. Other items, including clothing, sporting goods, household goods, jewelry, and artwork, should also be in great shape. Clothing, in most cases, should have been bought in the past year or two so that it won't be out of style, says Schneider.

If you have designer-brand clothing, accessories, or jewelry to sell, consider one of the new virtual consignment shops that specialize in high-end fashion, such as TheRealReal, Rodeo Drive Resale, or Linda's Stuff.

Maximize your return

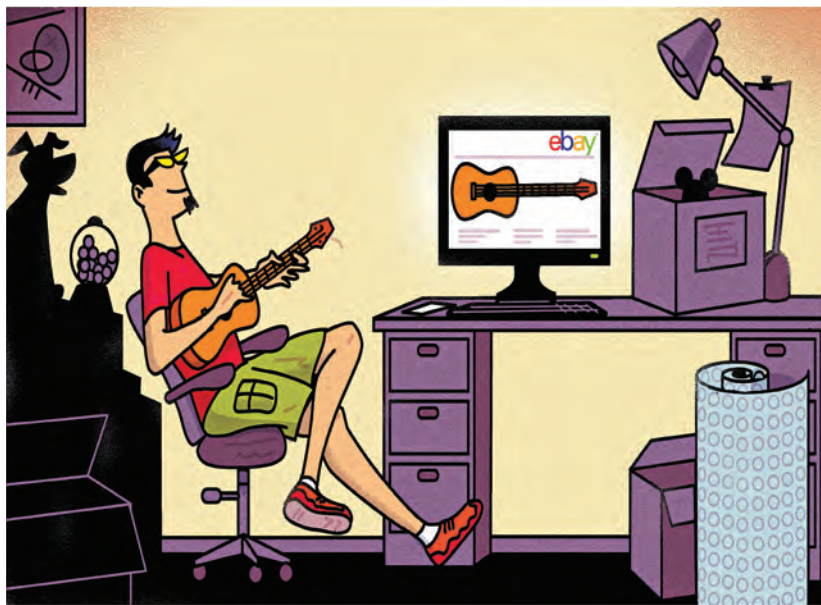
Find an appropriate shop. If you want to sell through local stores, visit a few to see how merchandise is displayed and make sure they stock items like the ones you have to sell. The busier it is, the better. Find local consignment shop owners who are members



of the National Association of Resale and Thrift Shops by doing a ZIP-code search on its site, NARTS.org (click on "Whatever your needs ... Find it here" on the home page). If you want to use a website, check the list of designers and goods it will accept.

Ask shopkeepers how much money you might make. Most consignment shop owners see sellers by appointment only, so call first. Show them your goods or photos of them. They will suggest a selling price; usually, a store's cut is 50 percent. Ask whether your item's price will be reduced if it doesn't sell within a certain time frame. Most shops will generally return unsold items after 90 days or may donate unsold items to a charity and give you a receipt. Shops should give you a written contract that spells out who is responsible for lost or stolen goods, the payment schedule, and what happens if your goods don't sell.

Check website terms carefully. Before you deal with any website, see what kind of traffic it gets, what it will charge you for its services—including the percentage of the sale it will keep—whether your items can be shipped to it and returned free if they don't sell, and who pays credit-card and PayPal processing fees. Linda's Stuff, for example, is hosted on eBay, so an international clientele will see your stuff. It gives consigners 80 percent on designer goods sales of more than \$5,000, 75 percent of sales greater than \$1,000, and 62 percent for any





lesser amount. The site will pick up your stuff free, but you'll have to pay to have unsold items returned to you (or it will donate the items and send you a receipt). If it determines your goods are not authentic (or they can't be authenticated), it will charge you \$20, plus return shipping. But Linda Lightman, the site's founder, says her company absorbs all PayPal and eBay fees.

ONLINE SALES

Putting up your items on eBay or Amazon will attract millions of potential buyers. You'll need some marketing savvy to make your offerings stand apart.

Sell what's in demand

One-of-a-kind items, gently used sporting goods, clothing, electronics, and popular collectibles sell best, says Lynn Dralle, who runs TheQueenofAuctions.com, a site that helps people sell goods on eBay.

Consider posting easy-to-ship items on a site such as Amazon or eBay. If you have heavy, bulky items to sell, try free online listing services such as Craigslist. The ads are divided into local regions, allowing buyers to pick up items themselves.

Maximize your return

Get some help. If you're new to these sites, Amazon, Craigslist, and eBay have helpful tutorials explaining the steps to selling on their sites.

List it right. See what similar items are going for on the site you choose. On auction sites such as eBay, check the prices items actually sold for (the "completed listings"), not the minimum-bid prices.

Keep descriptions short. Most buyers research by title, so include all you need there. Include any condition info, such as pristine, chipped, or stained.

Investigate the fees. You can generally list up to 50 items per month for auction on eBay free, for example. You'll pay a sliding scale of fees, depending on what the item is and how much it sells for, plus a shipping charge (see pages.ebay.com/help/sell/fees.html#if_auction for more details). Amazon charges 99 cents per sale plus a sliding scale of fees if you post fewer than 40 items per month, plus shipping charges and a referral fee (see amazon.com/gp/help/customer/display.html?nodeId=1161240 for more details).

YARD SALES

Although planning and running a yard sale take up a lot of time, you don't have to pay anyone a commission on the money you make. But before you post signs, call your town's government office to see whether you are required to get a permit to hold a sale. If you do, it will probably cost only a few dollars, but the cost of a fine for neglecting to get one could wipe out your profits. Also ask whether there are restrictions on where you can post signs to your sale.

Can't make a sale? Get a tax break.

If efforts to sell your unwanted stuff are unsuccessful, you can take a tax deduction for donations of used clothing and household items that are in good or better condition. You must be giving to an IRS-qualified organization. See IRS Publication 526, *Charitable Contributions*, at irs.gov for rules on what constitutes a qualified organization.

You'll have to do a little legwork to figure out how much you should deduct. The IRS says that the fair-market value of used clothing and household goods is the price that buyers would pay for them in a consignment or thrift shop. Some charities provide valuation guides on their websites to help you figure out how big a deduction you should claim. Choose an amount that makes sense given the garment's age and quality. Tax preparation software, such as TurboTax and TaxCut, also includes valuation guides.

It's important to maintain a paper trail of your contributions in case the IRS audits you. Different rules apply, depending on the value of your gifts. If you claim a tax deduction for a noncash contribution worth less than \$250, the charity should give you a written acknowledgment that includes its name, the date and location of your donation, and a description of your gift. If the value of your donation falls between \$250 and \$500, the acknowledgment must also say whether you received goods or services in return (and if you did, an estimate of the value).

The more generous you are, the more paperwork you'll have to fill out. If your gift is worth more than \$500, you must attach Form 8283 to your tax return. For donations valued at \$5,000 or more, you must also send the IRS a written appraisal of your gift. You can deduct the cost of the appraisal, however, subject to the 2 percent limit for miscellaneous itemized deductions.

Sell what's in demand

Just about anything that's not precious enough to put in an auction, consignment shop, or online—including broken items—is fair game. "People often buy things for parts at garage sales, especially broken electronics," says Lynda Hammond, author of "Garage Sale Gal's Guide to Making Money Off Your Stuff" (Gibbs Smith, 2011).

Maximize your return

Don't price anything. Figuring out what to charge is the most time-consuming and stressful part of garage sales, says Hammond. Ask buyers for their best offer; they will often name a price that's higher than the one you would have suggested. "I had a friend who wanted to get rid of a dining room table and chairs and was going to put a \$150 price tag on it before I convinced her not to," says Hammond. "A man at her sale told her he only had \$400 on him for the set; she was so flustered she talked him down to \$300."

If people seem too shy to negotiate, then you can name a price. To get an idea of appropriate valuation, check out Statricks.com. It aggregates pricing data from online auction sites such as eBay and classified sites such as Craigslist on hundreds of thousands of used products, including small appliances, bicycles, cell phones, computers and accessories, musical instruments, photo and video equipment, sporting goods, and video games.

Get the word out. You can place free

classified ads on websites such as Craigslist, eBay Classifieds, GarageSaleHunter, and YardSaleSearch. Make sure you mention the categories of items you'll be selling. Also post information about your sale on social-media sites such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

Make enough directional signs to attract people to your house from major routes. Hammond suggests using signs no bigger than 15x15 inches that simply say "Sale" and have an arrow pointing the way.

Go through your stuff. There's a good chance you've forgotten about a \$20 bill you slipped into a jacket pocket or keepsakes you stashed in drawers.

Start on Thursday or Friday. And start early—say, 6 a.m. or 7 a.m.—to ensure that you'll get the going-to-work and driving-the-kids-to-school crowd. "You'll have few other sales to compete with, and you'll get serious shoppers," Hammond says. You can always continue the sale during the weekend if you have items left to sell.

Be friendly. People are less likely to buy from someone who is reading a book or talking on the phone, and more likely to buy if you greet them and are available to answer questions and negotiate.

Think about security. Keep your house locked during your sale, and keep your money and a phone with you at all times. People toting counterfeit bills sometimes turn up at garage sales, so turn down payments in big bills.



When to get an appraisal

You might want to get a written opinion from a professional appraiser if you think something you'd like to sell might be worth a good deal of money—say, \$1,000 or more. The results will tell how much a buyer might pay and what and how much insurance you should have to cover it.

But written appraisals can be expensive. Most professionals will charge \$100 to \$300 or more an hour to look over your goods, do some research, and write up a detailed valuation. If you'd like a ballpark figure, you can ask an appraiser whether he or she can look the item over and give you a rough idea of what it might be worth. Expect to pay for at least an hour of his or her time.

The American Society of Appraisers, the Appraisers Association of America, and the International Society of Appraisers can help you find local, qualified professionals through a ZIP-code search on their websites.





WHERE THE DEALS ARE

Your guide to the end-of-summer sales season

BACK-TO-SCHOOL isn't just for kids anymore. Some of the hottest deals of the year happen in the final weeks of summer. You'll find deep discounts on items you could use as much as any high school or college student, including computers, printers, and small appliances. August and September are also prime bargain-hunting months for cars because dealers have to make room on their lots for next year's models. And

if you're able to get away on a vacation, it's a great time to save on airfare, hotels, and other travel services.

Pick your spots, though, because not every end-of-summer deal is a steal. More retailers and service providers are trying to get in on the action with phony sales or bait-and-switch tactics. On the following pages, we tell you which deals are for real, and which could leave you out in the cold.



Cooking gear. Manufacturers usually introduce new cooktops, ranges, and wall ovens in early autumn, ahead of the busy holiday cooking season. To make room, retailers discount older models in August and September. Floor models might be reduced by up to 50 percent, saving you hundreds. But inspect them closely for wear and tear. If you find dings or missing parts, try to negotiate the price even lower.

HOT TIP When it comes to deals on large appliances, Best Buy beats Home Depot, Lowe's, and Sears, and rivals regional players Abt Electronics and HHGregg, according to our recent survey of more than 22,000 readers.



Back-to-school buys.

Computers are often reduced 30 to 50 percent, and cell phones are discounted 20 to 30 percent, says Dan Butler, a spokesman for the National Retail Federation. Many of the top Android smart phones have already been introduced for the year, but if you're an Apple fan, it might make sense to wait. Its new models come out in the fall, and we're anticipating major hardware updates.

Paper, pens, tablets, and backpacks are also on sale in August. So are wardrobe basics: Blue jeans, khakis, white shirts, socks, and underwear are all 20 to 25 percent off, and you'll see even bigger discounts on sneakers.

With millions of students heading back to college, towels are marked down 20 to 30 percent—same with sheets, although usually on the twin sizes. Coffeemakers and small countertop microwaves are on sale, too.

HOT TIP Some states drop the sales tax on clothing, footwear, and certain school supplies for several days in July or August to coincide with back-to-school shopping. The exemptions and spending caps vary widely, so check your state's department of revenue or tax website for details.



Labor Day discounts.

Home centers often push home-improvement products over the holiday weekend. "Paint is on sale because manufacturers know that consumers have that extra day to get projects completed," says Debbie Zimmer of the Paint Quality Institute. You might also see deals on cordless drills and other power tools.

Mattresses are another popular Labor Day sales item. But so-called blowout sales can be misleading because retailers will often issue huge markups that make "50 percent off" sound better than it is. Salespeople, many of whom work on commission, will also steer you toward a pricier model. In our latest survey, the Original Mattress Factory was tops for service, price, and selection.

HOT TIP Home centers traditionally run Labor Day promos on many paints that do well in our Ratings. At Home Depot, we've seen \$5 off gallons of top-rated Behr paint; Lowe's has had the same discount on recommended Valspar paint.

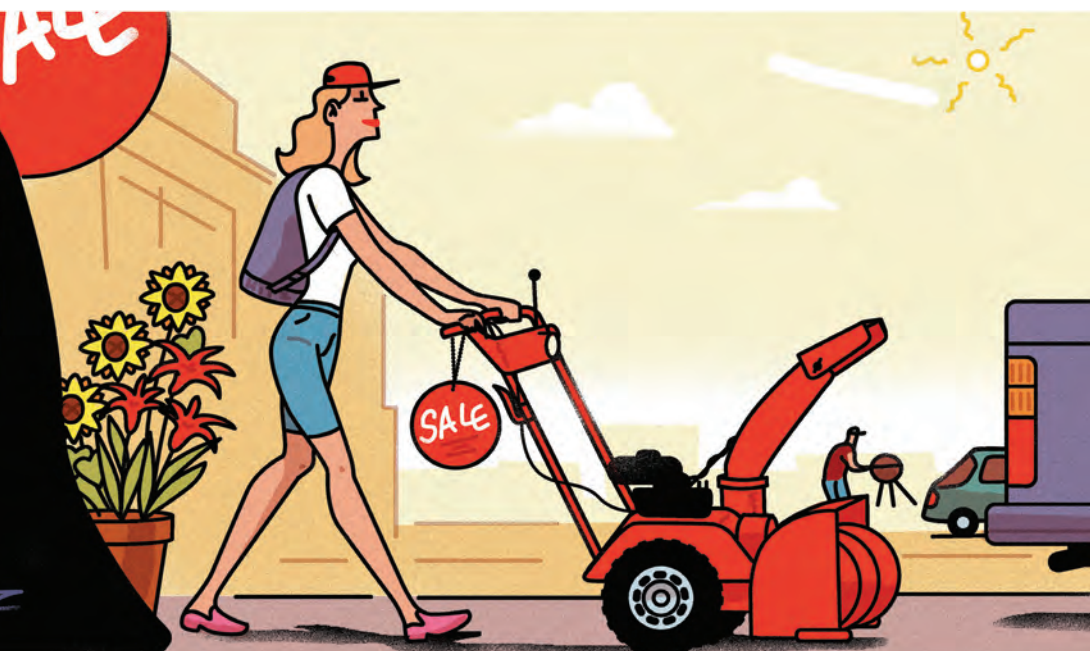


Deals on wheels. New car models often debut in the fall, so you might find discounts of 15 percent or more in August and September on leftover models. Buying a year-end closeout model makes particular sense if you plan to keep the vehicle for five years or longer. Otherwise, you'll lose out on the trade-in value because cars see their biggest depreciation in their first year. Check out our free "New Car Preview" on ConsumerReports.org for a list of cars that have been redesigned for 2015.

Because dealerships lose money the longer they hold on to a vehicle, they might try to cover their losses by pushing unnecessary extras, such as corrosion protection or an extended warranty. Buy a car with good predicted reliability and skip such extras.

HOT TIP The Toyota Camry, one of our highest-rated midsize sedans, has been updated for 2015, though the changes are largely cosmetic. So you might save upward of \$4,000 on the 2014 model without compromising on performance. One caveat: The Camry was updated midyear to improve its crash protection. Be sure to get the "2014.5" model, as noted on the window sticker.





Spa treatments. Back-to-school is a stressful time, especially if it involves shopping for school clothes with sulky adolescents. That's why more spas have started discounting massages and facials by 20 to 50 percent in August and September, says Lynne McNees, president of the International Spa Association.

HOT TIP Check the Facebook page and Twitter feed of popular spas in your area. The industry sees a lot of last-minute cancellations, so companies often post deep discounts on social media to help fill the openings.

Lawns and beyond.

You'll find deals on patio furniture, lawn mowers, camping equipment, and other outdoor gear in August, but if you wait until September, prices might be slashed in half. Perennials, shrubs, and trees also see deep discounts, though make sure you choose species that can be planted in the fall.

HOT TIP This past winter's heavy snowfall caused a run on snow blowers in many parts of the country. This year's shipments will start to arrive in late August. Keep an eye out for deep teaser deals, which retailers use to get the attention of customers who still have summer on the mind.

Gift ideas. Want to get a jump on your holiday shopping? Most bike manufacturers launch new models in early autumn, so you'll see discounts on older models of 10 to 40 percent in late summer. The best deals are in cold-weather climates where snowfall puts an end to the bike-riding season.

Late summer is also the time to look for discounts on action camcorders, because current models will soon be replaced. And look for teaser sales on new models of digital cameras and wireless speakers.

HOT TIP China, dinnerware, glassware, and flatware are often 25 to 50 percent off during the popular wedding months of September and October. Even if you're not shopping for newlyweds, this is a great time to replace chipped dishes, missing platters, and other items that will help make your holiday table sparkle.



Budget travel. After Labor Day, prices drop on airfare, hotels, and theme parks—luggage, too. Monday and Tuesday are usually the best days to snag cheap airline tickets. Sign up for e-mail price alerts to help stay on top of the offers. And if you can travel during a 24- to 48-hour window rather than on a specific date, your chances of landing a great deal will go up.

As for the best destinations, "Hawaii rarely experiences bad weather, and you'll find many airlines and hotels offering 40 percent off for September travel there," says Courtney Scott, senior editor at Travelocity. Hotels throughout the Mediterranean slash prices in late September and early October, after most tourists have gone home. Check out Italy's Amalfi Coast and Spain's Palma de Mallorca. For travel in October and into November, deals abound in Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao, and other Caribbean hot spots. November hurricanes are rare in the eastern Caribbean, but still consider travel insurance.

HOT TIP Shop at Costco? You can find great vacation deals—say, 20 to 40 percent off peak prices—through its travel service. After Labor Day, an all-inclusive four-night stay (with meals) at the Hard Rock Hotel in the Dominican Republic will be discounted to \$789 per person.



And where the deals aren't ...

Not all products and services are cheapest at the end of summer. Here are five categories in which it pays to wait:

Cruises. January is the start of "wave season," when cruise lines offer their deepest discounts—as much as 65 percent off—for the coming year.

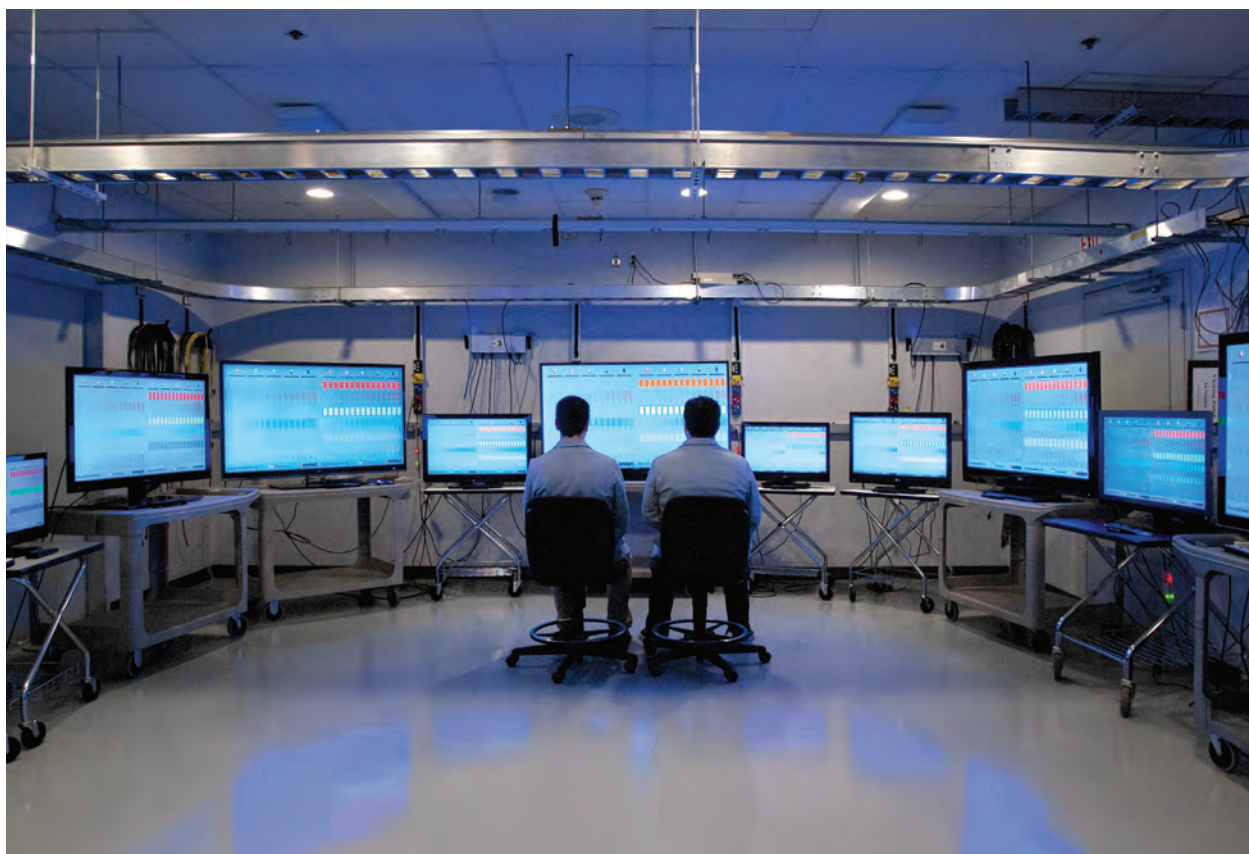
Fall/winter clothes. Retailers do their first markdown on sweaters, coats, hats, and scarves around Labor Day, but unless you wear a hard-to-fit size, wait for more markdowns to follow, the best being right after Christmas.

Gaming systems. Most new games are released right before the winter holidays, often with free add-ons, such as a controller and subscription membership. The systems and accessories might also be bundled for the holidays.

Furniture. February is when last year's sofas, sectionals, and the like go on sale, because new lines arrive after the High Point Market trade show in April.

Refrigerators. Manufacturers introduce new models from May through July, making spring the best time to find a deal on older ones.

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WHEN CUSTOMER SERVICE BECOMES SELF-SERVICE

Whether you're banking or buying groceries, companies are moving toward a do-it-yourself approach. Here's how to survive and thrive.

OUTSOURCING OF JOBS has been a painful, recurring theme in the past several years, but here's a twist. More companies are outsourcing customer service—to their own customers.

Remember when attendants pumped gas, clerks bagged groceries, and the sales help measured your feet before you tried on a pair of shoes? Today at Applebee's and Chili's, tableside computer tablets

allow patrons to order food and drinks and pay the bill without a waiter. Got a tech-support problem? Forget the help line. Just post your question to a company's message board or community forum on its website and wait for amateur troubleshooters to respond.

The do-it-yourself economy is transforming industries, services, and society at 4G speed. Why have companies embraced self-service so enthusiastically? To save money. A customer-service transaction

handled by a live agent usually costs between \$2 and \$10, compared with just pennies for, say, placing an order online, says John Goodman, vice chairman of Customer Care Measurement & Consulting, based in Alexandria, Va.

Credit the availability of inexpensive, improved, and widely embraced technologies for much of the transformation—along with digitally savvy millennials who expect answers quickly and are more comfortable interacting with touchpad screens than people, according to Shep Hyken, a customer-service expert and author of “Amaze Every Customer Every Time” (Greenleaf Book Group Press, 2013).

Of course, most people don’t really think about service until they experience a problem. Self-service shouldn’t mean no service. Try canceling an online order immediately after pressing “submit.” Chances are you can’t. Or try tracking down live help if an eBay transaction goes sour. We’ll offer advice on how to cope in this self-service world and what to watch out for.

The quickening pace of self-service

There’s plenty to like about self-service, especially for routine tasks. It’s empowering and gives customers ultimate control over an experience.

Speed is at the heart of many of the initiatives. Take Walmart’s Scan & Go program, in 200 of the megachain’s 4,200 stores. Shoppers can grab, scan, and bag items as they cruise the aisles, then wirelessly transfer all of the products scanned to their smart phone (enabled with the Walmart shopping app)

to a self-checkout in one move. “The purpose has never been to push people to a self-service model,” says spokesman Ravi Jariala. “Our customers are mobile savvy. It’s really about allowing customers to shop Walmart in a faster, friendlier, more convenient way.” Stop & Shop and Giant (of Landover, Md.) offer similar ways to shop via mobile app or handheld scanning device.

We asked Consumer Reports’ Facebook fans to share their opinion of customer self-service, and most accept it as the new normal.

“I’d rather do it myself than have someone earning minimum wage telling me what my options are and getting it all wrong,” confessed Barbara Herron of California. “I occasionally mess up, but not as often as when somebody who doesn’t care is providing the service.”

The downside of do-it-yourself

One danger is that many consumers are at risk of being left behind, either unable or unwilling to adapt. Consumer-behavior expert Brian Wansink, director of Cornell University’s Food and Brand Lab, says such consumers may increasingly pay extra for demanding personal customer care. Airlines such as US Airways charge \$25 to make a reservation by phone. Spirit Airlines imposes a \$10 fee on travelers who ask an agent to print a boarding pass. Banks are moving in that direction, too. Customers with a Virtual Wallet account at PNC Bank are charged \$3 for staff-assisted transfers.

Nor do lower labor costs necessarily translate into cheaper prices. Though self-service



might mean savings of a nickel or dime per gallon at the pump in the highly competitive retail-fuel industry, that’s the exception. Companies utilize self-service for efficiency gains and cost savings, says Robert Atkinson, president of the Information Technology & Innovation Foundation, a Washington, D.C., think tank that wrote the report “Embracing the Self-Service Economy.” Job losses are inevitable in many industries as well, with those at the low end of the wage scale particularly vulnerable, Wansink says.

Then there’s the loss of human contact and the opportunity for companies and customers to forge a bond that goes beyond

Life at the speed of technology

The do-it-yourself movement is revolutionizing the way consumers go about routine activities and tasks from banking to filing insurance claims. Here’s how some companies are putting it into practice.

Esurance

The insurance company’s mobile app speeds up the claims process by allowing customers to upload accident photos and get an automated estimate of the damage, often eliminating the wait for an adjuster to show up for an appointment.

Hyatt Hotels

Want to avoid waiting to check in or out? At some Hyatts, guests can bypass the line and go straight to an automated kiosk and complete the task with a credit-card swipe. They can also use the kiosk to request a room upgrade or add an amenity.

Walmart Scan & Go

In a test at 200 of the chain’s 4,200 stores, customers can use their Walmart-app-enabled smart phone to scan items as they cruise the aisles, put them in their cart, and pay in one step by scanning a QR code—a dotted square that can be read by smart-phone cameras—at the self-checkout.

Zipcar

The Avis-owned firm allows rentals lasting from an hour to seven days. You sign up to become a member and receive a Zipcard. You book online or via mobile app, walk to the designated car, and swipe your card across a reader on the windshield. The doors automatically open, and you turn on the engine and drive off.

Pods

The toughest part of moving is lugging all of those heavy and bulky belongings to the truck. With Pods, the company drops off a cargo container for the consumer to pack, then handles the grunt work of hauling the “pod” to your new home—on your schedule, not theirs.



dollars and cents. A decade ago, most luxury hotels had a concierge, says longtime lodging industry analyst Bjorn Hanson, now divisional dean of the New York University Preston Robert Tisch Center for Hospitality, Tourism, and Sports Management. A 23-year-old might prefer to seek dining and entertainment recommendations via social media, but a concierge can give that guest a “wow” experience by getting him a reservation at an exclusive restaurant or fantastic seats to a sold-out show, he says.

Similarly, you can shop online for clothes but can’t feel the fabric or try them on, says retail specialist Jack Abelson of Leawood, Kan. “You and a computer are never going

to be friends,” Abelson says. “With human beings you can have a relationship; that’s not possible with a device. Businesses are focused too much on price, not value. Thus they ignore the value attached to a service such as an expert opinion as to how a garment looks and fits.”

What’s next?

More technology will ultimately lead to more self-service, the experts say. For example, once the price of radio-frequency-identification technology drops enough, the tracking tags can be incorporated into low-cost items such as groceries. When that happens, even the self-checkout might become obsolete, because customers could complete the process by wheeling their carts nonstop through a barrier—like a high-speed E-ZPass lane on a highway—that automatically totals all of the items and bills you electronically.

Customer Care Measurement’s Goodman predicts the future of customer service will build upon the marriage of mobile and video.

Expect to see more consumer interaction with companies via video chats, whether you’re ordering a hamburger at a fast-food restaurant or banking. Tech support is likely to come in the form of a representative looking over your shoulder—from your phone—and guiding the repair process step-by-step.

“Service will be virtual, at a distance,” Goodman says. “More tailored, more personalized, and more visual due to video in both directions. The challenge is to be personalized but not creepy.”

How to find help in a self-help world

Technology that makes self-service possible also gives consumers a powerful voice. Internet forums can turn one person’s headache into a corporate nightmare. Companies actively patrol social-networking venues such as Facebook and YouTube to monitor what’s being said about them—and often respond to a concern before it goes viral. Twitter has become the go-to brand for customer support; be sure to incorporate the company’s Twitter handle in your critique. There’s even an app called GripeO that will take your complaint right to a company’s doorstep.

Here are other tips:

- Though few firms post their toll-free numbers on all of their Web pages, more and more offer live chats with agents. It’s faster and more efficient than e-mail because you can have a clear dialogue. Be sure to print or e-mail yourself a transcript of the conversation before signing off.

- User communities within a firm’s site are a surefire way to get noticed. You can post questions and comments, and air grievances about products and services. Often a representative will join the discussion to put out a fire before word gets out. According to one study, disgruntled complainants are almost three times more likely to express their unhappiness to others than those who have a good experience. Each dissatisfied customer spreads the word to about 28 people.

- Sidestep automated phone menus. Check out websites such as DialAHuman.com and GetHuman.com, which list hard-to-find customer-service numbers and advise how to bypass automated prompts to get a live person.

- Use the “E” word. If you make it through to a live person and still feel you are getting the runaround, tell the agent you want to “escalate” your complaint. That’s a guaranteed attention grabber because agents can be criticized for bumping too many calls “upstairs” to a supervisor.

- Climb the corporate ladder. If your comments are ignored, go to the bottom of the website’s home page and sniff around for hyperlinks to “corporate contacts,” “investor relations,” “company information,” and so forth. That’s where you can usually find contact details for top management.

Panera 2.0

Restaurant customers can place their orders online or by mobile phone up to five days in advance and pick up their order at a predetermined time without waiting. They can also place orders the same way from anywhere inside the bakery-café and have them delivered to the table.

US Airways

Airlines encourage customers to have as little interaction as possible with employees. Kiosks are undeniably handy to print e-tickets and boarding passes. But if you want a paper ticket, the company charges \$50. And if you want a receipt for an e-ticket after the flight, you’ll pay \$20 to do so by calling Reservations.

PNC Bank Virtual Wallet

PNC designed its Virtual Wallet mobile money management account for Generation Y consumers who want to manage their spending and saving in real time. Account holders actually get charged for interacting with an employee. Each staff-assisted transaction costs \$3.

City National, Cadence Bank ATMs

City National in Los Angeles has unveiled a new generation of cardless ATMs—you can remove cash via a secure mobile app. Cadence Bank, based in Alabama, has ATMs that go beyond simple transactions to offer video screens that allow virtual interaction with remote tellers.

Ultra HD

Best picture yet

These TVs have even higher resolution than a 1080p set. But before you spend a bundle on one, here are 10 things you need to know.

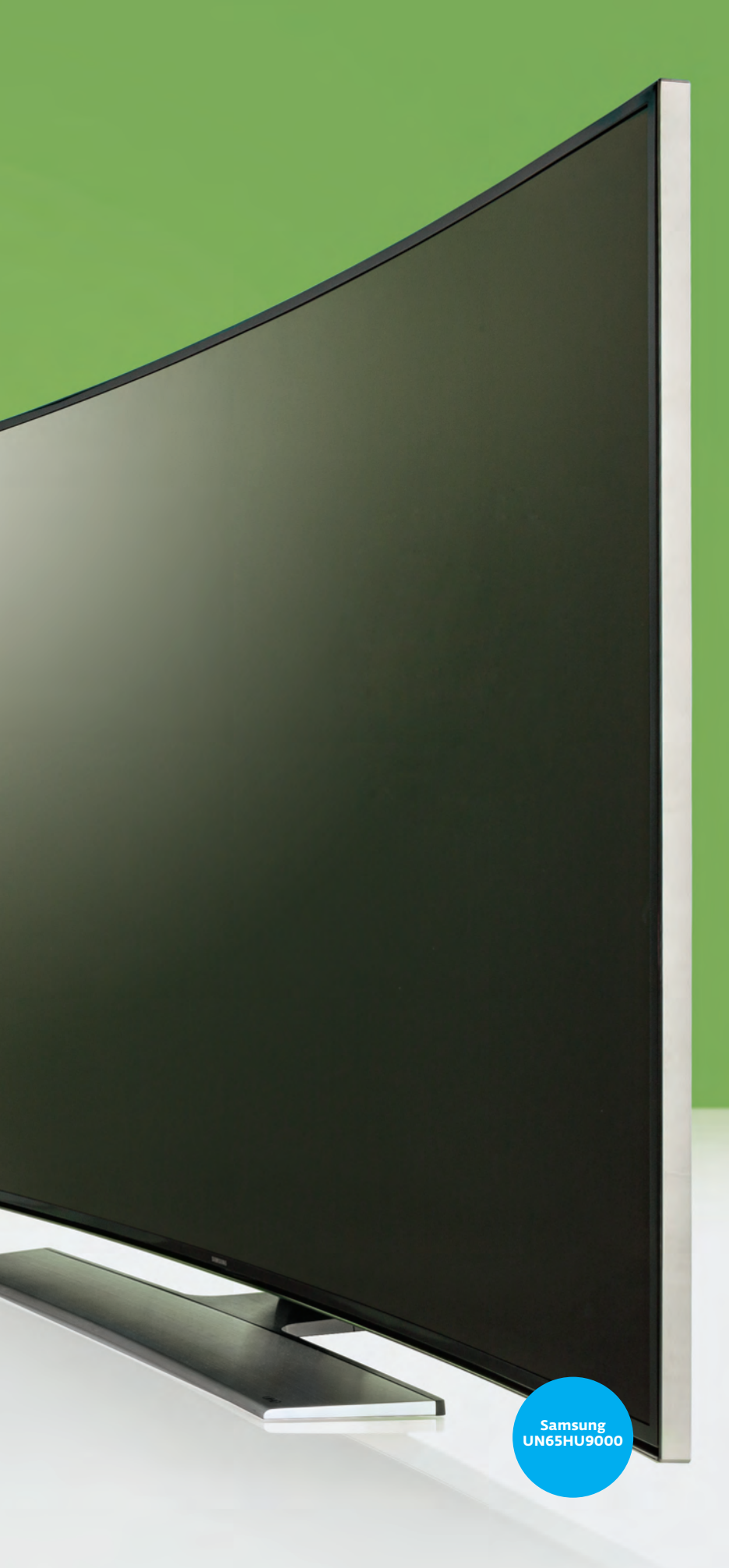


NOW THAT YOU'VE finally outfitted almost every room in your house with a flat-panel HDTV, there's a new technology being touted as the next big thing: ultra high-definition (UHD) TV. It sounds impressive, with super-detailed pictures that have four times as many pixels (picture elements) as a 1080p HD set.

And UHD isn't just a concept that will take years to materialize. It's here. At press time, there were a few dozen major-brand UHD TVs, all LCD/LED models, with screens from 49 inches up to 85 inches, and prices from about \$1,500 to \$10,000. (We're testing

several of the newest UHD sets in our labs. See our first look on page 40.)

So are 1080p TVs past their prime? Not by a long shot. This isn't like the move from standard definition to high def, which was a huge jump in quality. With 1080p and UHD, the difference can be difficult to detect. It's more of a baby step, and one you don't have to take immediately—unless you're ready for a new TV, you want the state of the art, and you're willing to pay for it. We'll start with the basics, then help you decide what the UHD transition means to you.



1 What is ultra HD?

Despite the fanfare, UHD TVs aren't a new kind of TV. UHD is simply higher-than-high-def resolution. The first UHD sets are all LCD models with LED backlighting. A 1080p TV has 1,920 pixels horizontally by 1,080 vertically, which is about 2 million pixels. A UHD TV has a screen resolution of 3840x2160, or more than 8 million pixels. With all of those extra pixels, even the smallest details stand out—the finest strands of hair and the subtle texture of a cotton shirt, for example. (The 3840 number is close to 4,000, which is why UHD TVs are also known as “4K” sets.)

2 So the more pixels, the better the picture?

If it were that simple, all UHD TVs would look great—but that's not the case. We've seen some that had only middling picture quality despite having extra detail. Top picture quality also requires rich, accurate colors, high-contrast images, deep blacks that render shadow detail even in very dark scenes, and sufficient brightness. Like top-scoring HDTVs, the best new UHD TVs have all of that, plus amazing detail, and the resulting picture quality is stunning.

3 Are you saying that one of these new sets can blow away my current TV?

Not really. It depends on a few factors. In our labs, experts scrutinizing 1080p and 4K versions of the same movies on HD and UHD sets sitting side by side could see noticeable differences, including finer texture, sharper type, and smoother edges on the UHD set. But when they stepped back to a normal viewing distance, the differences were hard to detect—in fact, a casual viewer would have trouble telling the HD and UHD sets apart. On a very large screen, say, 84 inches and up, you can really appreciate UHD. But with a 65-inch screen like the ones we tested, most viewers would probably think that the HDTV looked just as good.

Samsung
UN65HU9000

4 What is there to watch on a UHD set?

There's a limited amount of 4K content available now. Netflix is streaming a few programs such as "House of Cards" in 4K, and Amazon and M-Go should have offerings later this year. Sony sells a media player, \$500, with 50 free titles and pay-per-view downloads. Samsung offers a hard drive, \$300, loaded with a handful of titles. Both work only with the same brand of TV. DirecTV plans to offer 4K programming within the next year, and Comcast has announced plans to stream 4K video on demand. You can also play your own high-resolution digital photos and home videos from a 4K camcorder. But it will take a while until we have Blu-ray discs, and even longer for 4K broadcasts. Until then, you'd be watching a lot of high-def programs on your UHD set.

5 Hmm. How is that going to look?

You might be pleasantly surprised. We found that Blu-ray movies actually looked a bit better on a UHD TV than on an HD set. That's because 1080p content is up-converted to the ultra HD TV's higher resolution, and the greater pixel density of the 4K screen enhances the detail. (Note that the quality of upconverted HD will vary depending on how well a particular model handles the video processing.)

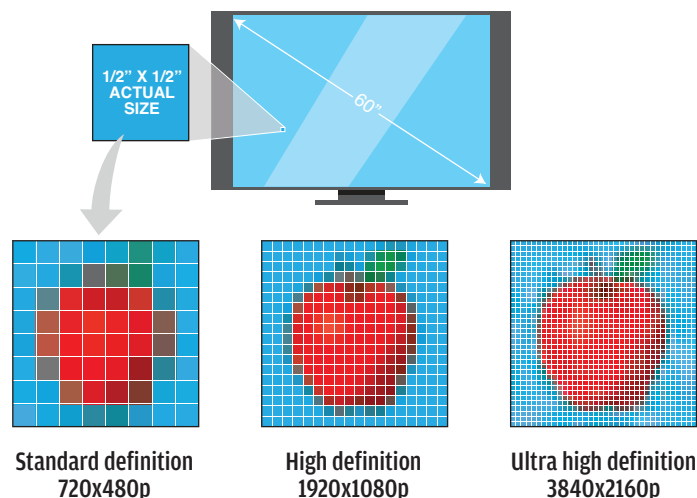
Sharp's quasi-ultra HD: More detail but ...

Sharp claims that its new Aquos Quattron Plus (Q+) TVs go beyond regular high-def resolution to approach ultra HD in picture quality, thanks to its pixel technology. All Aquos Quattron sets add a yellow subpixel to the usual red-green-blue mix; Q+ models subdivide each pixel to create more detail on a 1080p screen. We put three Q+ sets—the 60-inch LC-60TQ15U, \$1,800; 60-inch LC-60UQ17U, \$2,000; and 70-inch LC-70SQ15U, \$2,400—through a slew

of tests and found that the picture did look a bit more detailed with UHD content. But with 1080p programs, we saw some jaggies along the edges and a smearing of detail on dark images. In addition, the TVs lack HEVC decoding and HDMI 2.0 inputs, two features on all 2014 UHD TVs. Given the limits of Q+ technology and the comparatively high prices, it would make more sense to buy a top-performing 1080p TV or a true ultra HD TV, especially when prices drop.

The difference is in the detail

The more pixels in a given space, the more detailed an image looks. As a screen gets bigger, you need more pixels for sharp detail. The apples below represent a half-inch worth of pixels from a 60-inch screen at standard definition, full HD (1080p), and ultra HD. The HD image has six times as many pixels as SD, and ultra HD has four times as many as HD. The difference is obvious up close, at normal reading distance. From farther away, it's hard to tell HD and ultra HD apart, but SD still looks coarse.



6 Do you need special cables so that everything works properly?

No. Current high-speed HDMI cables will work fine with an ultra HD TV, despite what you might be told in a store. We've been testing UHD TVs in our labs using the same high-speed HDMI cables we use to test 1080p TVs, and they're absolutely fine. So don't let someone tell you that you need a new, more expensive "Ultra HD" HDMI cable. They're just looking to sell you a high-margin accessory.

7 OK, so how much will one of these TVs set me back?

They're not cheap. Generally speaking, the latest UHD sets cost \$2,000 and up—way up—depending on screen size. Expect to pay anywhere from \$2,000 to \$4,000 for a 55-inch set from a major brand, and in the neighborhood of \$3,500 to \$6,000 or so for a 65-inch set. Prices range from \$6,000 to \$10,000 once you get into the 70- to 85-inch range (and bigger sets are coming). That's a lot more than you'd pay for a first-class HD set. For example, several highly rated 55-inch 1080p sets in our Ratings sell for less than \$1,500. But expect UHD prices to come down big-time later this year. A few words of caution for bargain-hunters: You might be tempted to buy a leftover 2013 UHD set at a discount. We advise against that. Those sets lack the latest features (for you techie types, a built-in HEVC decoder for streaming 4K video, and HDMI 2.0 inputs), which you'll need to get the most out of 4K. And we'd pass on low-priced UHD sets from lesser-known brands. Those we've tested haven't done as well as big brands.

8 Even bigger sets are coming? How big, and why?

Hold on to your recliner. We've seen prototypes of TVs with 105-inch and 120-inch screens from companies such as LG, Samsung, and Vizio. The companies didn't say exactly when the jumbo sets would arrive or how much they would cost, but we imagine they will be budget busters. There's a reason to go big with UHD. The larger the screen, the better you can see and appreciate the detail. In fact, you might not notice it much on a screen smaller than 70 inches or so if you sit about 8 feet from it, a typical distance in many homes.

9 Should I buy now or wait?

We'd advise most consumers to wait. (Even our TV experts are holding off!) Prices will come down, and there will be more 4K content to watch—possibly even 4K Blu-ray movies—in a year or two. Also, new features, such as high dynamic range for improved contrast and an expanded range of colors, could be incorporated into

ultra HD TVs during that time. If you need a new TV now, stick with a top-rated 1080p set—unless you're a well-heeled early adopter who wants to experience the current state of the art in TVs. Then consider an ultra HD set, the biggest you can afford, to get the best experience.

10 How long before an ultra HD TV is outdated?

You haven't even bought a UHD set yet and you're already worried about obsolescence? As long as a UHD TV has HEVC and HDMI 2.0, it won't be outmoded for years. That's not to say newer models won't have added features (such as high dynamic range, more realistic colors, and even faster frame rates for improved motion resolution), but they'll be incremental improvements, not must-haves. The next big thing could well be OLED (organic LED) TVs, which combine the best of LCD and plasma technology. There are a few pricey 1080p OLEDs for sale now, and an even more expensive ultra HD model is expected later this year. It's likely to take a few years for OLED to become mainstream. So if you've decided to buy a UHD set now, enjoy it and stop worrying about what comes next.



Curved screens: Style over substance

After years of pushing ever-flatter, thinner TVs, manufacturers are throwing buyers a curve—literally. LG, Samsung, and Sony now offer TVs with curved screens. The design is eye-catching, but the curve doesn't add much to the viewing experience.

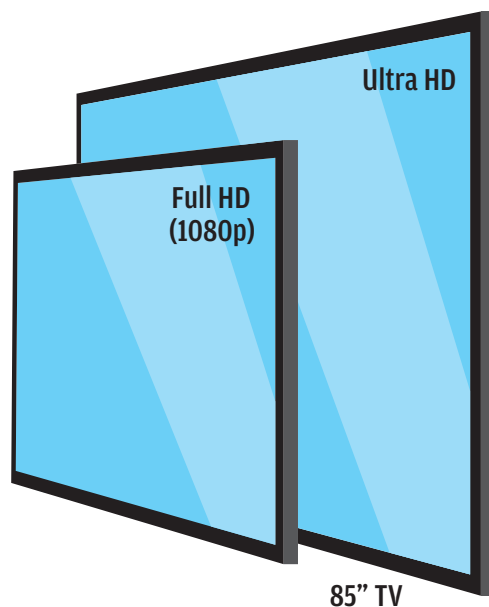
With a 100-inch screen, we found that the curve added an immersive, cinematic aspect, but that wasn't the case on smaller TVs. And there's a downside to the design. The curve can make for uneven brightness and a reduced viewing angle on the sides of the screen. Keep in mind that it won't be flush against the wall if wall-mounted. So is it worth it? It's more of a design choice, and it depends on whether you like the look.

The perfect excuse for a bigger screen

If you get too close to a TV, you'll see the tiny dots making up the images rather than smooth, natural detail. With a UHD TV, you can sit much closer than to an HDTV without seeing the pixels. That means you can get a larger set without having to move your sofa farther from it. So at a normal distance of 8 feet or so, you can trade up from a 55-inch 1080p set to an 85-inch UHD TV—assuming you can afford it. With the larger screen filling your field of vision, you may find that it creates a more theaterlike experience.



55" TV



85" TV

Typical viewing distance of about 8 feet

Ultra HD TVs for early adopters

Here's a first look at several of the newest UHD sets, which are still being tested in our labs. We'll have full Ratings soon. These are all LCD sets with LED backlights.



Samsung UN65HU9000, \$4,300

Its eye-catching curved UHD screen is striking, and so is its excellent picture quality. Befitting its flagship status, this 65-inch TV is loaded with features, including smart TV and 3D capability.

Sony Bravia XBR-65X950B, \$8,000

Sony's pricey, 65-inch flagship model is loaded with bells and whistles, including 3D, smart TV, and a full-array backlight with local dimming that produces black levels that even a plasma fan will love. It comes with two remotes, including a cool touchpad clicker.



Panasonic Viera TC-58AX800U, \$3,300

This full-featured 58-inch TV has excellent picture quality, plus a smart TV interface that can be personalized; it will also make recommendations based on viewing habits. In addition to HDMI 2.0 inputs, it has a Display-Port 1.2 input for 4K PC gaming.

Samsung UN50HU8550, \$2,000

If neither your room nor your budget is jumbo-sized, consider this 50-inch UHD set. It offers great picture quality, the company's smart TV service, and a special feature that can split the screen into four panels, each with its own content playing.



Not ready for ultra HD yet?

These four HDTVs hold their own even against ultra HD sets, and their great picture quality should please most viewers. The LCD sets use LED backlights.



Samsung UN60H6350, \$1,400

Smack dab in the middle of Samsung's LCD/LED TV lineup, this 60-inch set delivers excellent picture quality and a lot of features—including the company's smart TV platform—at an attractive price. It comes with a universal remote control that lets you control other gear.

Sony Bravia KDL-55W950B, \$1,600

This 55-inch LCD/LED TV in Sony's flagship 1080p series this year is a bit pricey, but it has very good HD picture quality, a wider-than-average viewing angle for an LCD TV, and a ton of features, including smart TV.



LG 60PB6600, \$850

This 60-inch 1080p TV reminds us why we still like plasma TVs. It has excellent HD picture quality, an ultrawide viewing angle, and a nice array of features, including smart TV. And its price will make a lot of people smile.

Sharp Aquos LC-60EQ10U, \$1,300

This LCD/LED TV is a winner, with excellent HD picture quality, Sharp's smart TV platform, and a pleasing price. The TV's program guide has an integrated search that combines cable/satellite TV and streaming channels.



Lab Tests



A blender just for you

NINJA AND VITAMIX share the top spot in our Ratings of full-sized blenders. Now the brands are vying for bragging rights in the personal-blender category with the launch of two new mini-models: the Nutri Ninja and Vitamix S30.

Targeting on-the-go smoothie enthusiasts, personal blenders feature smaller containers

(usually 3½ cups or less) that can double as a travel mug. Their popularity helped drive total blender sales up about 17 percent last year. Our tests differ slightly between personal and full-sized models, namely with the volume of ingredients we pack into the devices. Here's what we found when we compared the two models head-to-head:



Vitamix S30

Price \$400

Points for versatility.

The Vitamix is something of a hybrid because it comes with a large 40-ounce blending container plus a 20-ounce travel cup with flip-top lid. Double-wall construction on the smaller container should help keep beverages cold, and its tapered design promises to fit most cup holders.

As for performance, the Vitamix aced our icy-drink test as a full-sized blender, but personal-blender results were only so-so. That means your take-out smoothies might not be as thick and creamy.



Nutri Ninja

Price \$90

Makes a better smoothie.

The Ninja has a single 24-ounce container, without any insulating claims, though the Sip & Seal lid is supposed to prevent leaks. It's not as multifunctional, but the Ninja was very good at producing smooth small-batch beverages, edging out the Vitamix. It's also a bit quieter.

Bottom line. If you're looking for an inexpensive way to start the day with a smoothie, choose the Ninja. If you need a capable, full-sized blender that also makes decent beverages to go, opt for the Vitamix.

New NutriBullet poses a hazard

"Even the toughest ingredients don't stand a chance," claims an infomercial for the NutriBullet Pro 900 blender, \$150. That wasn't our experience. Though it made an excellent piña colada and soup purée during performance testing, a blade on the machine cracked or broke on two separate units in our durability test, a stress test in which we crush seven large ice cubes 45 times to simulate rigorous use. One of the NutriBullet's second assemblies (each package includes two) also had a visible crack.

We are not aware of any injuries caused by this model, but because a blade fragment could hide in a beverage, posing a potential hazard for users, we've judged it a Don't Buy: Safety Risk. If you already own the product, we suggest you stop using it.

As we normally do when we find a safety concern with a product, we notified the company as well as the Consumer Product Safety Commission. NutriBullet LLC responded by stating that its product is not a blender or ice crusher and should not have been subjected to the ice-crush durability test, which we developed years ago after receiving increased consumer complaints about blender durability. The company added that crushing ice with the NutriBullet, without the presence of liquid or water, constituted a misuse of the product.

The NutriBullet Pro 900 is marketed by the distributor as a "superfood nutrition extractor." Yet retailers such as Amazon.com and Walmart sell it as a blender, and NutriBullet LLC compares it to "other blenders" in its owner's manual. As for the alleged misuse of the machine to crush ice, nowhere are consumers given that warning. We think it's a conceivable use. Indeed, on the company website, users are even encouraged to add ice to "NutriBlast" recipes because it "will give a slightly thicker consistency and nice chill." And though many recipes call for water, there's no explicit warning against using ice without liquid.

Given the NutriBullet Pro 900's potential safety risk, we recommend that you avoid it in favor of a blender that performed ably and safely in our tests. The Nutri Ninja and Vitamix blenders, left, both fit the bill.



Don't Buy: Safety Risk
NutriBullet Pro 900 Series



**Napoleon
Prestige Pro
665RSIB**



**Master Forge
RT2417S**



**Landmann
42172**

Keep the summer flames aglow

GRILLING SEASON DOESN'T END when the weather cools. And we keep buying and testing the latest grills available.

Here are some new models that made our recommended list, plus a Master Forge that's impressive and two accessories that promised to improve the grill you have, the BakerStone Pizza Oven Box and GrillGrates:

Large grills. The **Napoleon Prestige Pro 665RSIB** tops our Ratings. It has the biggest cooking area of the recommended grills, but at \$2,600, it's also the most expensive we tested. Preheating was fast and even, and high heat was impressive.

Temperature range was superb, and so was low heat and indirect cooking. It's loaded with handy features such as lit

controls and cooking area, a rotisserie motor and spit, and a slide-out tank tray for easy tank replacement. It has five main burners and stainless-steel grates, which tend to be good for searing.

The **Kenmore Elite 3358** also has five burners and many of those features. It performed similarly overall and costs \$1,600. Want to spend a lot less? The \$700 **Kenmore 16156** is a CR Best Buy from past tests.

It offers about the same cooking space as the \$1,600 Kenmore, and performance was similar—temp range was even better. And you still get a side burner, rotisserie burner, and lit cooking area for nighttime grilling, but you trade some stainless for painted metal.

Midsized grills. Excellent high and low heat, impressive indirect cooking, and fast, even preheating make Costco's **Landmann 42172**, \$460, appealing, and it comes with handy fold-down shelves and a grill cover.

But temperature range is so-so on the three-burner grill, and it has no side burner or long burner warranty.

The **Master Forge RT2417S**, \$370, is another model on which both side shelves fold for a compact profile, though it also lacks a side burner and a long burner warranty.

Preheating was fast and even, and it was one of the few grills to offer a superb temperature range. Impressive low and high heat help make this three-burner grill a very good pick.

Grill accessories



The BakerStone Pizza Oven Box, \$150, is claimed to give you your own wood-fired pizza oven, turning out pizzas in 2 to 4 minutes that are better than those made on a pizza stone because the box traps the hot air and uses it to sizzle and cook the

pizza's top and crisp the bottom. The porcelain-enameled steel box houses a refractory stone cooking chamber.

The big box weighs 27 pounds and is designed to sit atop the grill grates. We used it on a four-burner gas grill. After a 30-minute heat-up, we baked eight 12-inch pizzas in quick succession. They took about 4 minutes to bake and not much longer to devour. We also cooked pizzas using a pizza stone on a four-burner gas grill. We didn't see a big difference between the two, but the oven box did make nicely browned tops and crusts.



GrillGrates are aluminum plates with raised ridges and holes that let grease drip through. They're supposed to even out temperatures across the grill to improve evenness and block flare-ups, preventing charred and burned food. So we

tested them on two grills that scored fair or poor for evenness in our high-heat tests and on another grill that flared frequently. The results were mixed. They improved evenness on one grill but not the other. GrillGrates reduced flare-ups when we cooked salmon and tuna but didn't do as well when we grilled burgers. We paid almost \$100 for enough plates to cover the cooking area of a midsized grill. But the no-questions-asked return policy makes GrillGrates tempting. You can return them for a full refund within 30 days, even if they have been used.

All-in-one printers for any task

If you're shopping for a printer to use at home, chances are you're going to choose a multifunction inkjet. It can print, copy, scan, and maybe even fax documents. Are there other choices? Sure. But basic do-it-all printers account for much of the market these days, and they're a good value. We have tested dozens of them in our lab in recent months, and many performed very well. If you simply want an all-around machine for light home use, you can feel confident choosing any of our recommended models.

But certain models stand out if you have specific priorities—say, you want to print high-quality photos or churn out reams of documents

for a home business, school project, or community organization.

We have combed our Ratings to find models that excel at those tasks while remaining affordable, and those picks are in the chart below.

If low price is a high priority, we have you covered. Price is a tricky topic when it comes to printers. You need to consider the sticker price and how much ink the printer uses. In our tests, we found that printers differ greatly in how frugally they use ink. Check the Ratings for ink cost per month, maintenance ink use, and cost per text page and photos. All of our top picks have wireless networking (see below), and all except the Canon MX472 and HP Envy 4500 have Ethernet jacks.



Top pick: Budget

• **Canon Pixma MX472** \$70

This all-in-one inkjet is a great choice if you don't need every bell and

whistle but still want very good performance. It prints very good photos and text at a fast clip: A 4x6-inch photo takes less than 2 minutes, and it outputs nine pages of black text per minute. You won't get all of the features on pricier models, such as Ethernet connectivity, an LCD display, and memory-card slots. It has two ink tanks (black and color), which might use slightly more ink than models with individual-color ink cartridges. On the other hand, it doesn't use very much extra ink to maintain the print heads, which can save you money over the life of the printer.

Another budget model to consider

• **HP Envy 4500** \$100



Top pick: Home-office use

• **Epson WorkForce WP-3540** \$130

This model lets you print very good

text very quickly (12 pages per minute). The paper tray has a capacity of 250 sheets, more than most printers, so you won't be refilling it every time you turn around. It's a great choice if you want to crank out lots of flyers, pamphlets, or newsletters. It also has an auto document feeder, which makes it easy to scan or copy multiple pages. Our tests found that this printer produced text inexpensively (just a little more than 3 cents per page), but it uses a good bit of extra ink to maintain the print heads.

Another model for home-office users to consider

• **Brother MFC-J650DW** \$100



Top pick: Photos

• **Canon Pixma MX922** \$200

This all-in-one can print an excellent-quality 4x6-inch photo in

1 minute and an 8x10-inch photo in just under 2 minutes. It has a separate tray that can hold either 4x6-inch or 5x7-inch photo paper. And it prints good-quality photos even on plain paper. It's not perfect, though: It has no slot to print directly from a memory card, though if your camera or device has Wi-Fi, you can print wirelessly. One downside is that it runs through quite a bit of ink to keep print heads clean, more than a number of recommended models.

Other models for shutterbugs to consider

• **Canon Pixma MG5420** \$150
• **Brother MFC-J6520DW** \$200

More ways to print with Wi-Fi

Many all-in-ones, including all of the models listed, have wireless connectivity. That lets you print photos and documents from multiple computers and mobile devices on your home network, whether or not they're near the printer. Most of these models use Apple's AirPrint feature, which lets you print from iPads, iPhones, and Mac computers without installing drivers or downloading software. Most major brands have free apps for Android devices, and recent phones and tablets can print from their built-in Google Cloud Print service.

Ratings

Selected models only From 46 tested.

☒ CR Best Buy ☒ Recommended

● Excellent ● Very good ○ Good ● Fair ● Poor

Recommendation	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Overall score	Test results							Specifications		
					Ink cost/month	Maintenance ink use	4x6 photo cost	Photo quality	4x6 photo time (min.)	Text cost (per page)	Text quality	Text speed (ppm)	Sheet capacity	Auto-duplexing
				0 100 P F G V E										
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	Canon Pixma MX922	\$200	73	\$6.50	●	50¢	●	1.0	5.3¢	●	12.0	250	• •
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	Canon Pixma MX472	70	71	7.30	●	50	●	1.8	6.6	●	9.1	100	•
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3	Canon Pixma MG5420	150	71	6.90	○	50	●	1.0	5.5	●	11.1	125	•
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4	Brother MFC-J6520DW	200	71	3.90	●	35	●	0.9	1.9	○	12.5	250	• •
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	5	Brother MFC-J650DW	100	70	6.40	●	40	●	1.3	3.4	○	9.1	100	• •
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	6	HP Envy 4500	100	70	9.20	●	45	●	1.4	5.9	●	7.9	100	•
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	7	Epson WorkForce WF-3540	130	69	6.00	●	50	○	2.5	3.3	●	12.0	250	• •

Coffee in a hurry

Four pod coffeemakers top our tests

SPEEDY BREWING and no-mess convenience have helped pod coffeemakers edge closer to drip machines in sales and earn a hallowed place on many bridal registries. More models also whip up hot chocolate and espresso along with an adequate cup of joe. But if you're looking for rich coffee taste, our latest tests suggest that you'll want to give drip coffeemakers a second look. We also found three new pod models that made our coffee-hungry testers wait longer than they liked for that first cup.

Starbucks makes the grade. A new entry from Starbucks produces a first cup in about 90 seconds and repeat servings in even less time. That helped put its new Verismo 600, \$160, among our top picks. But limited brewing range kept servings on the weak side. As with K-Cup models, it won't let you use two pods at once for a stronger brew. A better bet: DeLonghi's new Nescafé Dolce Gusto Circolo Flow Stop, \$180, which improves on the earlier version with selectable

cup sizes for precise water control.

Espresso in a hurry. Unlike most pod coffeemakers, Nespresso's VertuoLine, \$300, is this brand's first that makes coffee in addition to espresso. It forms a thick foam or *crema* on the brewed coffee, which appealed to our staffers. The model just missed our picks because of less consistent temperatures from cup to cup, but its foam—and the espresso function—make it worth considering.

Three lag behind. A trio of newly tested models were notably slow at delivering the first cup. Keurig's K75 Platinum Brewing System, \$180, scored well otherwise, though Mr. Coffee BVMC-KG6, \$100, offered little beyond consistently hot servings. The Elite Cuisine Dual Cup Pod Brewer EHC-233, \$35, makes you wait for both the first and second cups because it must cool down before it can brew again. That and its two tiny, 6-ounce ceramic mugs make it dubious for coffee-quaffing couples who want an ample blast of morning java on the double.

DeLonghi
Nescafé Dolce
Gusto Genio
EDG455T



Shopping tips

Manufacturers tell us speed and convenience outrank taste for pod-machine buyers. But our Facebook fans put taste at the top of their wish lists. Here are ways to get a better cup with less work—and less harm to the planet from all of those plastic pods:

Check the controls. Models that scored well for brewing range let you dial in a stronger brew by adding less water. Some let you use two pods at once (noted in the Ratings).

Consider the selection. Many pod models make tea, hot chocolate, and even soup, as well as a variety of coffees. Those that use Keurig's K-Cups also accept loose coffee in refillable pods.

Look for labor-savers. Removable reservoirs can be filled at the sink. Adjustable drip trays let you fit a larger cup, and built-in water filters can help eliminate off-tastes from your tap.

Keep plastic pods out of landfills. Soft pods such as Senseo's are made of biodegradable paper, which breaks down readily. Most plastic pods, including Keurig's newer Vue Packs, use polypropylene and are recyclable in communities that accept No. 5 plastic. Keurig's mixed-plastic K-Cups are more difficult to recycle; the company plans to make all of its pods recyclable by 2020.

Best pods from our taste tests

The top-scoring DeLonghi is among the pod machines that limit you to coffee from the same manufacturer. The good news: All three take **Nescafé's Dolce Gusto Morning Blend** capsules, 59 cents per serving, which are among those our professional tasters liked best. Here are top

pod coffees for other machines:

- **Folgers Gourmet Selections Lively Colombian Medium Roast** (K-Cups), 68 cents
- **Keurig Vue Barista Prima Coffeehouse Colombia Medium-Dark Roast** (Vue Packs), 77 cents
- **Tassimo Nabob 100% Colombian** (T Discs), 71 cents



Cuisinart Grind & Brew DGB-700BC

For serving a crowd

These drip coffeemakers topped our tests, can brew a tastier cup, and can usually serve up eight or more at a time. You can also program them to have your morning java ready when you are:

- **Mr. Coffee BVMC-SJX33GT**, \$40 (drip model with carafe). Lets you serve several guests at once from its carafe.
- **Viente Brew-N-View CAF-05T**,

\$140. This machine dispenses fresh-brewed coffee directly into a cup or mug, so family and friends can serve themselves.

- **Cuisinart Grind & Brew DGB-700BC**, \$150 (left). Like other grind-and-brew models, this one grinds fresh beans without a separate grinder. And like others, it brings added complexity and more parts to clean and maintain.



2 DeLonghi

4 Starbucks

Overview

Pod coffeemakers that made our picks were fast and especially convenient to set up and use. They also scored respectably in our taste tests and delivered consistent coffee temperatures from cup to cup.

☒ **Recommended** These high-scoring models stand out for the reasons below.

BEST FOR MOST PEOPLE

- 1 DeLonghi** \$130
4 Starbucks \$160

1 holds 21 ounces of water and, as with the other DeLonghi models, offers 18 varieties of Nescafé capsules. It was tops overall and delivered the most consistent serving sizes, but it required a few break-in cycles before it began brewing normally. **4** costs a bit more, and its reservoir holds a bit more than a quart; it matched the DeLonghi for consistently sized servings. But beverage options are limited to a dozen.

LESS REFILLING

- 2 DeLonghi** \$150
3 DeLonghi \$180

Paying for **2** buys a 44-ounce water capacity, sleeker styling, and blue LED lighting for your cup, though getting consistently sized servings with its manual control is a bit iffy. **3** offers the same capacity but with precise choices in serving size.

Guide to the Ratings

Overall score is mainly speed, temperature and size consistency, taste, and convenience. Scores for previously tested models may have changed because of changes in testing or scoring. **Speed, first cup and repeat**, are speed of brewing first and second cups of coffee (about 7 ounces). **Consistency, temperature and size**, compare first and subsequent cups. **Brewing range** is ability to produce weak to strong brews with controls and water levels. **Taste** is based on coffee experts with Colombian coffee, where available. **Convenience** is ease of controls, reservoir refill, and cleanup. **Beverage options** shows number of choices offered by manufacturer. **Price** is approximate retail.

Ratings

All tested models In performance order, within types.

☒ Recommended

● Excellent ● Very good ○ Good ● Fair ● Poor

Recommendation	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Beverage options	Overall score	Test results					
						Speed, first cup	Speed, repeat	Consistency, temperature	Consistency, size	Brewing range	Taste Convenience
		Similar models, in small type, are comparable to tested model. Pod formats are in parentheses.			0 100 P F G VG E						
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	DeLonghi Nescafé Dolce Gusto Genio EDG455T (Nescafé capsules)	\$130	18	78	●	●	●	●	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	DeLonghi Nescafé Dolce Gusto Circolo (Nescafé capsules)	150	18	76	●	●	●	○	●	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3	DeLonghi Nescafé Dolce Gusto Circolo Flow Stop (Nescafé capsules)	180	18	73	●	●	●	●	○	●
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4	Starbucks Verismo 600 (Verismo pods)	160	12	73	●	●	●	●	○	●
	5	Nespresso VertuoLine (VertuoLine capsules)	300	12	68	●	●	○	●	●	●
	6	Bosch Tassimo T55 (Tassimo T Discs)	170	56	67	●	○	●	●	○	●
	7	Keurig Vue V500 (Vue Packs) ¹	170	64	67	○	●	●	●	●	●
	8	Starbucks Verismo 580 (Verismo pods)	150	12	65	●	●	●	●	○	●
	9	Mr. Coffee BVMC-KG5 (K-Cups)	80	227+	65	●	●	●	●	○	●
	10	Cuisinart SS-300 Compact Single Serve (K-Cups)	130	227+	62	●	●	●	●	○	○
	11	Keurig K75 Platinum Brewing System (K-Cups)	180	227+	61	●	●	●	●	○	●
	12	CBTL Americano (CBTL Capsules) Briosa	150	22	61	●	●	●	●	○	○
	13	Keurig Mini Plus Brewing System (K-Cups)	100	227+	60	●	○	○	●	○	○
	14	Keurig Vue V700 (Vue Packs) ¹	200	64	60	●	●	●	●	○	●
	15	Keurig Platinum B70 (K-Cups) ¹	180	227+	59	●	●	●	●	○	○
	16	Mr. Coffee Single Serve Brewing System BVMC-KG1 (K-Cups) ² BVMC-KG2	80	227+	58	●	○	●	●	○	○
	17	Bosch Tassimo T12 Brewing System (Tassimo T Discs)	80	56	58	●	○	●	●	○	○
	18	Flavia Creation 150 (Flavia Fresh Packs)	230	65	59	●	●	●	●	○	○
	19	Tru CMP-6 (Senseo-like pods) ²	90	11+	57	○	●	●	●	○	○
	20	Bosch Tassimo Suprema T47 (Tassimo T Discs)	140	56	56	●	○	●	●	○	○
	21	Cuisinart SS-700 (K-Cups) ¹	200	227+	52	●	●	●	●	○	○
	22	Gevalia G90 Reversible Pod (Senseo-like pods) ²	35	11+	51	●	●	●	●	○	○
	23	Bunn My Cafe MCP (Senseo-like pods) ²	300	11+	49	●	●	●	●	○	○
	24	Keurig K45 Elite Brewing System (K-Cups)	120	227+	48	●	●	●	●	○	○
	25	Elite Cuisine Dual Cup Pod Brewer EHC-233 (Senseo-like pods) ²	35	11+	42	●	○	○	●	○	○
	26	Mr. Coffee BVMC-KG6 (K-Cups)	100	227+	41	●	○	○	○	○	○
	27	Bunn My Cafe MCU (K-Cups, Senseo-like pods)	160	238+	40	●	●	●	●	○	○
	28	Hamilton Beach Personal Cup 49970 (Senseo-like pods) ²	25	11+	34	●	○	○	○	○	○
	29	Hamilton Beach FlexBrew 49995 (K-Cups, Senseo-like pods) ²	50	238+	25	●	○	○	○	○	○
	30	Tru Eco TE-258 (Senseo-like pods) ²	40	11+	23	●	○	○	○	○	○

¹ Discontinued, but similar model is available; price is for similar model. ² Programable. ³ Can brew two pods at once for a stronger or larger serving.

The Hot List

A monthly guide to the top products our testers recommend

Headphones

Model	Score
STEREO	
Grado Prestige SR325is, \$300	91
Bowers & Wilkins P7, \$400	86
Grado Prestige SR80i, \$100	86
HiFiMan HE-400, \$300	86
Shure SRH1440, \$300	81
Bowers & Wilkins P5, \$300	80
Sennheiser RS 180, \$330	80
Klipsch Image X10i, \$350	80
Polk Audio Nue Era, \$100	80
Westone ADV Alpha, \$150	80
NOISE-CANCELING	
Beats by Dre Beats Executive, \$300	85
SMS Audio Street by 50 ANC, \$280	82
Bose QuietComfort 15, \$300	74
Bose QuietComfort 20i, \$300	74



91

Grado Prestige SR325is

Vacuums

Model	Score
UPRIGHT	
Kenmore Elite 31150, \$350	74
Miele S 7210 Twist, \$475	72
Kirby Sentria, \$1,800	72
Miele S 7260 Cat & Dog, \$715	72
Kenmore Progressive 31069, \$200	71
Hoover WindTunnel Max UH30600, \$180	70
Hoover Platinum Bagged UH30010COM, \$300	70
CANISTER	
Kenmore Progressive 21714, \$400	72
Panasonic MC-CG937, \$330	71
Kenmore Progressive 21614, \$300	70
LG Kompressor LcV900B, \$400	69
Kenmore 22614, \$350	68
Kenmore Progressive 21514, \$250	68
Panasonic MC-CL935, \$330	68
ROBOTIC	
Roomba 760, \$450	90

72

Kenmore Progressive 21714



86

Behr Premium Plus Ultra Flat Enamel



Exterior paints

Model	Score
FLAT	
Behr Premium Plus Ultra Flat Enamel (Home Depot), \$37 per gallon	86
Benjamin Moore Aura Flat, \$68	82
California Paints Fres-Coat Velvet Flat, \$44	79
Sherwin-Williams Duration Flat, \$67	79
SATIN	
Behr Premium Plus Satin Enamel (Home Depot), \$31	79
Sherwin-Williams Duration Satin, \$68	78
Behr Premium Plus Ultra Satin Enamel (Home Depot), \$39	77
Ace Royal Exteriors by Ace Satin, \$28	77
SEMIGLOSS	
Valspar DuraMax Semi-Gloss (Lowe's), \$40	80
Ace Royal Exteriors by Ace Semi-Gloss, \$29	79
Behr Premium Plus Ultra Semi-Gloss Enamel (Home Depot), \$40	77
Behr Premium Plus Semi-Gloss Enamel (Home Depot), \$32	77
DECK STAINS	
Benjamin Moore Arborcoat Solid Deck & Siding, \$46 per gallon	79
Behr Solid Color Waterproofing Wood Stain (Home Depot), \$29	78
Cabot Solid Acrylic Siding, \$36	74

81

Samsung Galaxy S 5 16GB



Smart phones

Model	Score
AT&T	
Samsung Galaxy S 5 16GB, \$200	81
Samsung Galaxy S 4 16GB, \$100 (and similar 32GB, \$150)	81
Samsung Galaxy S 4 Active, \$100	80
LG G2, \$0	79
HTC One (M8) 32GB, \$200	79
HTC One 32GB, \$200 (and similar 64GB, \$300)	79
SPRINT	
Samsung Galaxy S 5 16GB, \$200	80
Samsung Galaxy S 4 16GB, \$50	79
LG G2, \$100	79
HTC One (M8) 32GB, \$200	78
HTC One 32GB, \$100	77
Samsung Galaxy Note 3 32GB, \$350	76
Samsung Galaxy S III 16GB, \$0	76
Apple iPhone 5s 16GB, \$150 (and similars 32GB, \$300, and 64GB, \$400)	76



85

Apple iPad Mini with Retina display

Tablets

Model	Score
7- TO 8-INCH 3G/4G+WI-FI	
Apple iPad Mini with Retina display 16GB, \$530 (and similars 32GB, \$630; 64GB, \$730; and 128GB, \$830)	85
Amazon Kindle Fire HDX 16GB, \$330 (and similars 32GB, \$370, and 64GB, \$410)	81
Google Nexus 7 (2nd gen.) 32GB, \$300	78
LG G Pad 8.3 16GB, \$300	76
Apple iPad Mini 16GB, \$430	75
7- TO 8-INCH WI-FI ONLY	
Samsung Galaxy Tab Pro 8.4 16GB, \$400	87
Apple iPad Mini with Retina display 16GB, \$400 (and similars 32GB, \$500; 64GB, \$600; and 128GB, \$700)	82
Acer Iconia W4-820-2466 64GB, \$325 (and similar W4-820-2984 32GB, \$300)	80
Google Nexus 7 (2nd gen.) 16GB, \$230 (and similar 32GB, \$270)	80
HP Slate7 Extreme 16GB, \$220	80
9- TO 12-INCH 3G/4G+WI-FI	
Samsung Galaxy Note 10.1 2014 Edition 32GB, \$530	89
Samsung Galaxy Note Pro 12.2 32GB, \$650 (and similar 64GB, \$750)	88
Apple iPad Air 16GB, \$630 (and similars 32GB, \$730; 64GB, \$830; and 128GB, \$930)	87
Amazon Kindle Fire HDX 8.9 16GB, \$480 (and similar 32GB, \$530, and 64GB, \$580)	84
Apple iPad with Retina display 16GB, \$530	82
9- TO 12-INCH WI-FI ONLY	
Samsung Galaxy Tab Pro 10.1 16GB, \$500 (and similar 32GB, \$500)	88
Samsung Galaxy Note Pro 12.2 32GB, \$750 (and similar 64GB, \$850)	87
Sony Xperia Z2 Tablet 16GB, \$500 (and similar 32GB, \$700)	87
Samsung Galaxy Tab Pro 12.2 32GB, \$650	86
Apple iPad Air 16GB, \$500 (and similars 32GB, \$600; 64GB, \$700; and 128GB, \$800)	84

Model	Score
T-MOBILE	
Samsung Galaxy S 5 16GB, \$0	81
Samsung Galaxy S 4 16GB, \$0	81
LG G2, \$0	79
HTC One (M8) 32GB, \$0	79
Samsung Galaxy Note 3 32GB, \$0	78
Samsung Galaxy S III 16GB, \$0	78
Apple iPhone 5s 16GB, \$0 (and similars 32GB, \$100, and 64GB, \$200)	78
VERIZON	
Samsung Galaxy S 5 16GB, \$200	80
Samsung Galaxy S 4 16GB, \$100	79
Motorola Droid Maxx, \$100	78
LG G2, \$100	78
HTC One (M8) 32GB, \$200	78
HTC One 32GB, \$100	77
Samsung Galaxy Note 3 32G, \$300	76
Apple iPhone 5s 16GB, \$200 (and similars 32GB, \$300, and 64GB, \$400)	76
LG Lucid 3, \$0	76

Price is based on 2-year cellular service or handset installment payment contract.

The Consumer Reports New Car Price Report includes access to the Build & Buy Service. Purchasers save an average \$2,791 off MSRP using this program.*



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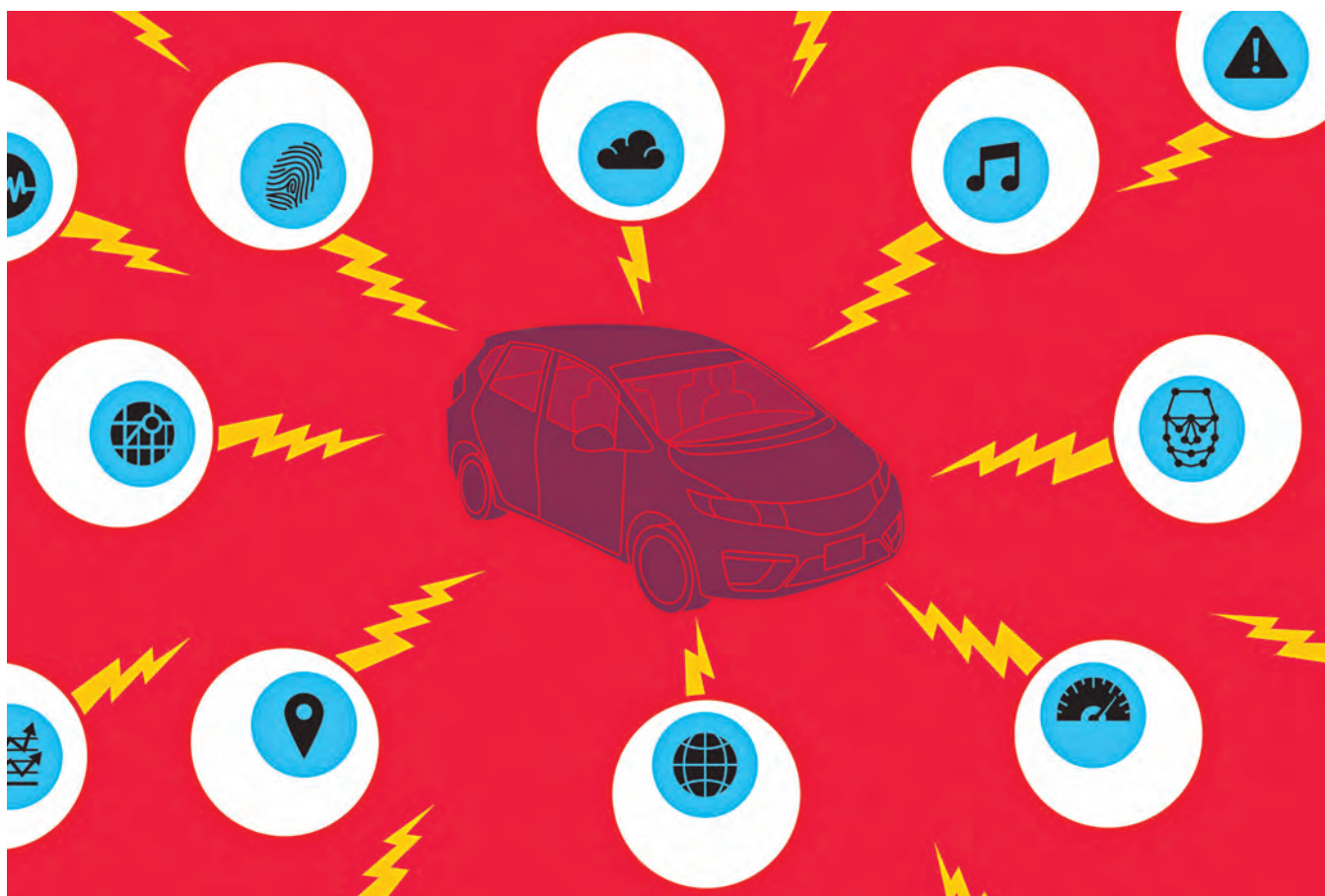
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*Between 04/01/13 and 04/30/13, the average estimated savings off MSRP presented to program users by participating based on user new vehicle configurations was \$2,791.

Cars



How your car is tracking you

You're trading personal information for safety and convenience

MANY DRIVERS HAVE a strong, knee-jerk reaction to the idea of “black boxes” in cars. When the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration asked for public comments on a proposed rule that would require all cars to have an event data recorder (EDR), commonly called a black box, its website was swamped by more than a thousand from people who were concerned about the privacy implications.

• “Big Brother is watching! No way should we allow ‘black boxes’ to be required on all new cars.”

• “It is not the role of government to be spying on its citizens.”

• “When the government starts making my car payment ... they can know where I’m driving.”

Invasive or not, the information captured by EDRs is just a trickle compared with the ever-growing stream of personal data flowing from our cars and electronic devices. Moreover, we often willingly trade that data for increased safety and convenience.

“Most people carry a cell phone, which is the most privacy-invading device in the world

today,” says Fred Cate, director of the Center for Applied Cybersecurity Research at Indiana University. “So before people go screaming to the state legislature over auto privacy, it’s worth at least keeping in mind that we have already given up that battle.”

What’s in the box?

EDRs are already used in 96 percent of new cars “to provide critical crash data that might not otherwise be available,” NHTSA says. Contrary to what many people think, an EDR doesn’t transmit a constant flow of

data from the car. According to the agency, it's an electronic memory chip that records a continuous loop of information flowing from the car's sensors and control modules. When a crash occurs, the EDR captures about 5 seconds of data before the event and less than 1 second after it. That includes how fast the car was moving, whether the brakes were applied, the timing of air-bag deployment, and seat-belt use. The data can be accessed only by connecting a special reader to the car.

That provides a wealth of information for auto-safety analysts and accident investigators, who can evaluate how a vehicle performed in very specific crash circumstances. Ultimately, drivers benefit from it through the safety advances in design and technology that will be used in later models.

A more immediate benefit is that the crash data can also help first responders decide where to send a crash victim for treatment. "We are really focused on what is the severity, what's the time sensitivity, and what's

the predictability of all the potential injuries that someone can get in a car crash," says Joel Stitzel, Ph.D., a professor and chairman of the biomedical engineering department at Wake Forest University. "And how do we use that information to make the best decision about them?"

Still, there is concern about the accuracy of the data, who owns it, and how it's being used. NHTSA says that it considers the information the property of the vehicle owner, and automakers say that the data is accessed only with the owner's consent.

But Sean Kane, president of Safety Research & Strategies, a company in Rehoboth, Mass., that studies product hazards, cautions that EDRs can be used against drivers in court cases and that sometimes the information doesn't match the physical evidence in a crash. Also, insurance companies might ask for access when disputing a claim.

Fourteen states have EDR privacy protections in place. For the rest, "It's the wild, Wild West, because people aren't going by

the rules and are grabbing the data for any reason they want," says Tom Kowalick of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers Standards Association. People in those states are still protected by the Fourth Amendment, but it might not be enough.

"You're never really secure until something gets put into law," says Jay Stanley, senior policy analyst at the American Civil Liberties Union.

In an attempt to bring about more clarity, the Driver Privacy Act was introduced in the U.S. Senate earlier this year, which specifies that EDR information is the property of the car owner and that in most cases it can't be accessed without consent. For details on state laws, go to the National Conference of State Legislatures website, at nsl.org.

Consumers Union, the advocacy arm of Consumer Reports, says that having EDRs in all cars is an important step toward improving auto safety. But it also says that car owners should own the data and that the privacy concerns of consumers should be respected.

Six ways to protect your data



The connected features in today's cars provide many benefits. They include using GPS navigation to get to a destination, pairing a phone to an audio system to play downloaded music or to easily answer calls, or using apps in an infotainment system to find food or gas stations. The trade-off is giving away some

personal information. But there are ways to safeguard it.

1 Stay anonymous. Don't share self-identifying information such as your Facebook status or publicize your location on social media. Also, don't store an address labeled "home" in a navigation system; instead, store the address of a public place.

2 Scrub the data. When selling a car, clear the navigation system of recently visited addresses, or adjust the settings so that the system doesn't save locations that you input. Don't download contacts to the car's phone system, and turn off the phone's Bluetooth connection to the car when you exit. Keep in mind that a mechanic or valet could easily access personal information if your phone is within range.

3 Read the fine print. Every company has a privacy policy, but many people don't read it. "Pay very close attention when you order any kind of in-car services about what their privacy practices and policies are," says Jay Stanley, a senior policy analyst in the Washington, D.C., office of the American Civil Liberties Union. "And do not accept something you don't want." Consumers can use their market power to demand good privacy, he says.

4 Cancel the data flow. If you're selling a car that has a telematics system or if you decide not to use it anymore, contact the company to let it know. Confirm what happens after you opt out and what is done with previously collected data.

5 Don't leave a trail. If you're concerned about the security of other information sent from your car, use cash instead of electronic toll-collection devices such as E-ZPass. Also, don't just turn off your cell phone; take out the battery, because phones still have tracking capabilities even when they're shut off.

6 Think security. Don't leave a portable GPS unit or any other electronic device in your car; take it with you. Lock your glove box if that's where you keep your insurance and registration information. And use a valet key instead of handing over your personal car keys.

Remote connections

Modern telematics systems, such as GM's OnStar, Mercedes-Benz's Mbrace, and Hyundai's BlueLink, can be a great aid to drivers. They can expedite help from first responders when there's a crash, help the police track down a stolen vehicle, and find nearby gas stations or restaurants. They can also let automakers perform remote diagnostics of the car while you drive. If a "check engine" light goes on, an automaker could diagnose the problem, let you know what it means and what to do, and even schedule an appointment at a dealership.

Though EDRs capture only a few seconds of data, telematics systems provide a regular stream about a car's location and other parameters. And it's not clear what data is collected and what is done with it. Even automakers don't seem sure about the best ways to use it.

"We're in this dead space between getting cars connected and delivering a compelling value proposition for the customer to compensate them for surrendering their privacy," says Roger Lancot, associate director at Strategy Analytics, a consulting company in Massachusetts that specializes in technology markets. He thinks that automakers should stop charging a subscription for those services, because the information gathered is worth more to them than it is to the customer.

Instead, he says, crash notification and service scheduling should be free, and drivers should pay for the convenience features.

Telematics can also be used to update vehicle electronics systems remotely. Recently, Tesla updated the ride-height suspension in its Model S electric cars through a software push after a NHTSA investigation concerning fires from road debris. Similarly, automakers could easily alert drivers about recalls or customer campaigns through the car, and even make safety upgrades without requiring the driver to go to a dealer.

The use of telematics data can be a slippery slope, however. In 2013, when the battery life of a Model S car was contested by a New York Times reporter, Tesla was able to produce data that appeared to show that he was draining the battery on purpose. The reporter argued that he was just having a hard

time finding a charging station in the dark. In that instance, using the data at face value showed some holes. Is that happening to everyone or just reporters, Kane wonders. And are car companies unnecessarily tracking drivers without their knowledge?

Trading privacy for a discount

A number of insurance companies are finding their own way to use telematics data to help drivers save money. A model called usage-based insurance allows consumers to reduce their premiums in exchange for providing driving data. State Farm's Drive Safe & Save program gathers odometer readings through OnStar and Ford Sync subscriptions, and in exchange a discount is applied to those

discount is recalculated and the device is sent back. Dave Pratt, Progressive's general manager of usage-based insurance, says that the company saves the data it collects for research purposes, and that it's "very unlikely we will ever share an individual's personal information. But it's useful to aggregate data." Upon request, it has provided automakers with a summary analysis of the collective data to help provide insights into driving behavior.

Critics are concerned about the motivation of insurers that offer those deals. "No insurance company has any interest in reducing profits," says Thilo Koslowski, vice president and lead automotive analyst at Gartner, an information technology research company.

But there are other benefits to insurers. "Our goal is to attract good drivers and keep them as customers for a long time," Pratt says. The data can also help insurers evaluate risk and set premiums.

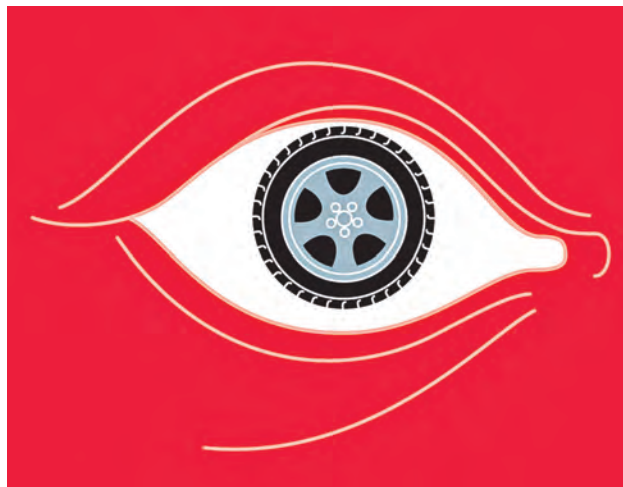
Privacy down the road

In-car connectivity is still in its infancy, with more driver benefits to come and more privacy concerns to surface. Partnerships are booming between automakers and technology companies such as Apple, Facebook, and Google, although the car companies say they don't share personal data with them.

Koslowski sees a future where the government aggregates data about where people drive and uses it to ease congestion or pollution. Automakers are looking for ways to make money from the data by matching personal information with advertising.

Going forward, drivers will probably see location-based ads on their cars' infotainment screens, for example, that offer coupons or discounts for nearby outlets. "Everyone is looking for another stream of revenue, and data is our next stream," Cate says.

"There are hundreds of billions of dollars of economy activity that are enabled by the car," Lancot says, "and it's wide open." Food, fuel, tires, parking, and more could be targeted. All will probably take advantage of location, customer information, driving behavior, and service history. But if automakers don't get those messages right, "they will come across as crazy and alienating."



who travel less. State Farm also has its own monitoring system called In-Drive. A device is plugged into a car's diagnostics port to collect data related to the distance driven, acceleration, braking, turns, time of day, and speed. Those factors are calculated to provide a discount between 1 and 50 percent. Drivers can see their grades online and earn more savings by improving their driving habits.

State Farm's website says that the data is used only to calculate a driver's discount. In an e-mail to us, the company claims that it isn't used "for purposes of cancellation, non-renewal, or surcharge of the auto policy."

Progressive Insurance has a similar program called Snapshot, which uses a plug-in device to track how much you drive, what time of day, and how often you brake hard. An initial discount is given after 30 days, and after six months of driving the



Three degrees of luxury

New models from Audi, Maserati, and Mercedes expand your choices

THE UNIVERSE OF LUXURY CARS is rapidly expanding. That's clearly evident by the three models we tested for this issue, which reflect the growing range of choices in size, performance, character, opulence—and yes, price.

The redesigned ultra-luxurious S-Class, the Mercedes-Benz flagship, is a showcase of comfort, convenience, and technology. At \$114,475, it's brimming with advanced features, including active safety systems that let the car almost drive itself in some situations, foreshadowing the autonomous cars of the future.

The compact Audi A3, with prices starting at less than \$30,000, is the latest in a wave of small luxury-branded models for buyers who have one eye on their budget and the other on gas prices. Derived from the upcoming 2015 Volkswagen Golf, the A3 might lack the plush, roomy environment and long list of features found in true luxury cars, but it's a solid, agile sedan that's enjoyable to drive.

From the sport-luxury camp comes the Maserati Ghibli, a new "entry level" model that starts at \$67,000. With its potent 404-hp turbocharged V6 and throaty exhaust, the Ghibli delivers on an emotional level, but it doesn't come together as a complete package.

All three models are too new for us to have reliability data, so they aren't recommended.

Ratings

In performance order.

☑ Recommended

● Excellent ● Very good ○ Good ● Fair ● Poor

Rec.	Rank	Make & model	Price as tested	In this issue	Overall road-test score	Predicted reliability	Overall mpg
					0 100 P F G VG E		

ULTRA-LUXURY SEDANS

☑	1	Tesla Model S (85 kWh)	\$ 89,650		99	○	84 ¹
	2	Mercedes-Benz S550 (AWD)	114,475	•	96	new	18
	3	Audi A8 L ²	91,275		91	NA	21
	4	Audi A7 3.0 TDI	70,895		90	new	28
☑	5	Lexus LS 460L	82,504		89	●	21
	6	Porsche Panamera S ²	105,110		81	NA	20
	7	BMW 750Li ²	97,525		80	○	18
	8	Maserati Ghibli S Q4	89,010	•	71	new	19

UPSCALE COMPACT SEDANS

	1	Audi A3 Premium (1.8T)	\$31,495	•	77	new	27
☑	2	Buick Verano Leather (2.4)	27,750		73	●	24
☑	3	Acura ILX (2.0L)	30,095		72	●	28
	4	Mercedes-Benz CLA250	36,500		64	new	28

¹ Miles-per-gallon equivalent (MPGe). ² Powertrain has changed since last test.

Why some models are not recommended. The Mercedes-Benz CLA250 and S550, Audi A3 and A7, and Maserati Ghibli are too new for us to have reliability data. We don't have sufficient reliability data for the Audi A8 and Porsche Panamera. The BMW 750Li, the Ghibli, and the CLA250 didn't score high enough in our testing.

ROAD-TEST
SCORE

96



Mercedes-Benz S550

THE S-CLASS is a benchmark of excellence that stands out in every important attribute for a luxury car. And the 2014 redesign has raised the bar even higher with its advanced technology.

The driving experience is first-class, with an extremely hushed cabin, effortless power delivery, and the most comfortable ride of any car we've tested. This big Benz shrugs off bumps and ruts, and it cocoons you in a relaxed and fatigue-free driving environment. Handling is responsive and enjoyable. And unlike most of its competitors, the S550 can dance with the alacrity of a C-Class sports sedan when the corners become demanding.

Cutting-edge technology is a given in this flagship. A comprehensive suite of active safety features that fall under the umbrella of Intelligent Drive use a battery of radar sensors and cameras to monitor the surrounding area and even take control of the car in certain circumstances. The Distronic Plus active cruise control not only keeps a set distance from a vehicle in front but can also automatically follow the lane you're driving in, the steering wheel eerily moving by itself, providing a glimpse of the proverbial self-driving car.

The lane-keeping assist feature warns you if the car is drifting out of its lane and even nudges it back. The PreSafe forward-collision system can sense a car or pedestrian in front and automatically brake the car to prevent or minimize a crash. And the rear seat belts

are inflatable, acting as mini air bags to prevent rib-cage injuries.

Cabin ambience is sumptuous, with huge swaths of polished wood, soft stitched leather, and chrome. Adding to the wow factor are snazzy mood lighting and an optional fragrance dispenser. Two huge digital screens sweep across the instrument panel. But operating all of the features and displays can be distracting.

Seat comfort is terrific. The bolsters can inflate as needed to hug you in corners, and the front seats can give you a massage to break up long-trip tedium. But adjusting the lumbar support requires using the screen and the center controller, which is annoying. Rear passengers enjoy living-room-caliber accommodations, with ample leg room, power controls for reclining and positioning the cushions, and power sunshades.

The S-Class is indeed opulent. It presents a remarkable technological showcase and hits the mark as a pampering, appealing, and enjoyable luxury liner.

Best version to get. As you'd expect in a car that starts at \$93,000, the S550 comes loaded. But with typical options, the price quickly inflates. Opt for the \$3,000 4Matic all-wheel-drive system if you live in a snowy clime. Blind-spot monitoring comes in a \$2,800 Driver Assistance package that requires you to get the \$4,500 Premium I package. We like the heated armrests and steering wheel, which are part of the aptly named \$2,600 Warmth and Comfort package.

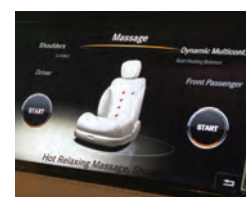


Tested vehicle

HIGHS	Very comfortable ride, quiet cabin, acceleration, braking, interior room, seat comfort, fit and finish, active safety systems
LOWS	Complicated and distracting controls, relatively small trunk, price
TRIM LINE	S550
DRIVETRAIN	449-hp, 4.6-liter turbo-charged V8; seven-speed automatic transmission; all-wheel drive
MAJOR OPTIONS	Premium Package (ventilated seats, parking assist, massaging front seats); Warmth and Comfort Package; Surround View System; Air-Balance Package; Driver Assistance Package (active cruise control, blind-spot monitoring, lane assist)
TESTED PRICE	\$114,475

More test findings

BRAKING	Short stopping distances.
HEADLIGHTS	LED headlights produce a superbright light with very good visibility, although the low beam has some unevenness.
ACCESS	Easy, with large, soft-closing doors.
VISIBILITY	Decent glass area with relatively thin pillars. A backup camera is standard.
CABIN STORAGE	Storage options are thoughtful, plentiful, and luxurious.
HEAD RESTRAINTS	All head restraints are adjustable.
CHILD SEATS	Reclining rear seatbacks need to be moved to an upright position before child seats can be installed.



SPA INCLUDED

Massaging front seats let you choose the intensity through the center controller and screen.



Audi A3

AN ATTRACTIVE \$29,900 base price makes the redesigned A3 a tempting buy for a German luxury sports sedan. And unlike some other entry-level luxury cars that have veered away from their brand's DNA (the Mercedes-Benz CLA and Lexus CT), this small car actually feels, drives, and looks like an Audi.

Based on the upcoming Volkswagen Golf, the A3 is a solid, nicely finished, and sophisticated compact sedan that's enjoyable to drive. It feels agile, with a quick response to steering inputs and minimal body lean. And it carves up winding country roads with confidence. The steering is a bit vague on center and at low speeds, but it firms up nicely at higher speeds.

The ride is quite firm, particularly at low speeds, but it does a commendable job of absorbing and isolating most bumps.

Our front-wheel-drive A3 Premium came with Volkswagen's 170-hp 1.8-liter turbocharged four-cylinder engine. The only transmission is a six-speed automated manual. There is ample power once underway, but power delivery isn't fluid and the car feels flat off the line, leading to complaints from staff members about hesitation when pulling into traffic. We measured a commendable but not outstanding 27 mpg overall.

To get Audi's Quattro all-wheel drive, you need to step up to the livelier 220-hp turbocharged four, which costs an extra \$3,000.

The interior is fairly quiet, and the front seats are very comfortable. The rear seat is cramped, not surprising for a compact car.

As you might expect at this price, you won't find a plush Audi cabin in the A3. The interior quality is pretty good, but it's rather businesslike, bordering on austere. The controls are almost identical to other Audi models, and they can be complicated at first.

Unlike the previous A3, which came only as a hatchback, all A3s are sedans for now. A hatchback version with a diesel engine (and front-wheel drive only) will be available in early 2015, and a plug-in hybrid, called the A3 E-tron, will arrive next summer.

The A3 has an inviting price, but you could save a few thousand dollars and get a similar driving experience by buying a Volkswagen Jetta GLI or the new Golf. Of course, you would give up the prestigious Audi badge as well as the availability of all-wheel drive.

Best version to get. It's tempting to get the basic Premium version, with the 1.8-liter engine, for its relatively low price. But it lacks many handy features that you should expect for the price. At least add the \$350 Audi Music Interface with iPod integration so that you can charge your phone and browse for music through the car's controls. Overall, you might be happier with the Premium Plus trim, which includes more of the features you expect in a luxury car and lets you get the \$1,400 Driver Assistance package, which includes a backup camera and blind-spot monitoring. In reality, a nicely equipped A3 will cost you about \$35,000.



POP UP The center screen, used with Audi's MMI (Multimedia Interface) system, extends from and retracts into the dash.



Tested vehicle

HIGHS	Handling, feels solid, braking
LOWS	Tight rear seat, some controls, price for the size, tepid power off the line, headlights
TRIM LINE	Premium
DRIVETRAIN	170-hp, 1.8-liter turbocharged four-cylinder engine; six-speed automated manual transmission; front-wheel drive
MAJOR OPTIONS	Metallic paint, Cold Weather package
TESTED PRICE	\$31,495

More test findings

BRAKING	Very short stops.
HEADLIGHTS	Xenon headlights provide a superbright light but lack forward distance.
ACCESS	Fairly small doors, especially in back.
VISIBILITY	Easy enough with thin windshield pillars. A backup camera is an expensive option.
CABIN STORAGE	Several small bins.
HEAD RESTRAINTS	The center-rear restraint must be raised to provide protection.
CHILD SEATS	Forward- and most rear-facing seats should be secure when installed with the seat belt. Easily accessible LATCH anchors are available for the outboard seating positions.



TIGHT REAR Adults in the rear seat will find that their knees push into the front seatbacks, and tall people will brush against the headliner.

Maserati Ghibli

THE MASERATI NAME carries an exotic mystique. And the opportunity to park one in your driveway for less than six figures is what's behind the latest incarnation of the Ghibli. But glamour aside, this Maserati doesn't really gel as a package that fully delivers on its promise of sporty elegance.

Maserati, like Chrysler and Ferrari, is owned by Fiat. And the Ghibli's "entry level" price was achieved through a creative sharing of parts. The Maserati-designed engine, built by Ferrari, is the main attraction. Chassis basics come from the Chrysler 300 and previous-generation Mercedes-Benz E-Class. And yes, some interior switches match those found in Dodge Darts.

The Ghibli, which refers to a hot Saharan wind, can be invigorating to drive. The throaty exhaust note is soul-stirring. The 404-hp turbocharged V6 engine, matched to an eight-speed automatic transmission, provides breathtaking acceleration, especially in Sport mode, when the transmission upshifts in a rapid-fire style. The communicative, well-weighted steering is reassuring. And the suede and leather interior adds to the rich ambience.

But there are many aspects of the car that are underdeveloped. The Ghibli's overly firm ride allows most bumps to come through strongly, with only a token level of isolation. And ride motions tend to make the car feel a bit unsettled.

Handling is fairly agile but not overtly sporty. The steering provides great feedback but isn't particularly quick. And despite the stiff suspension, the Ghibli displays more

body lean in corners that one might expect, although it was secure on our track.

Our all-wheel-drive Ghibli S Q4 has plenty of power, but the initial turbo lag can make it feel a bit flat and underwhelming when you first hit the throttle. We measured only 19 mpg overall, which is among the lowest in the class. And the fussy electronic shift lever is frustrating to use.

The Ghibli's exhaust note can be invigorating, but the car suffers from pronounced wind noise on the highway and a constant drone in the cabin that drew complaints, especially from our rear-seat passengers.

The front seats are good-sized and decently shaped, but they aren't anything special. And the tight rear seat, with its skimpy leg room, is a letdown.

One high point is the Chrysler-based touch-screen infotainment system. Unlike the systems in many competitors, it's intuitive and easy to use.

The interior is impressively dressed in rich, high-quality materials, but we found huge gaps in the trim and cheap-looking switches from the Chrysler parts bins.

Even if you view the Ghibli as a four-door sports coupe rather than a cushy and accommodating sedan, those flaws and compromises are not befitting a car, such as ours, costing almost \$90,000.

Best version to get. Base prices are academic, because all Ghiblis contain built-in packages that jack up the price quickly. We'd splurge on the Ghibli S Q4, which provides 59 more horsepower, all-wheel drive, and other desirable goodies.



Tested vehicle

HIGHS	Exhaust sound, steering feedback, acceleration, braking, transmission, fit and finish
LOWS	Ride, initial turbo lag, wind noise, rear seat, access, touchy brake pedal, fussy shifter
TRIM LINE	S Q4
DRIVETRAIN	404-hp, 3.0-liter turbocharged V6 engine; eight-speed automatic transmission; all-wheel drive
MAJOR OPTIONS	Extended leather interior, 19-inch sport wheels, Sport package, Premium package, Alcantara roof lining
TESTED PRICE	\$89,010

More test findings

BRAKING	Outstanding braking performance.
HEADLIGHTS	Bi-xenon headlamps provide bright light and good side illumination but lack distance.
ACCESS	Difficult because of the low roof, short doors, high sills, and frameless windows.
VISIBILITY	Small windows, thick pillars, and a high rear deck restrict the view out.
CABIN STORAGE	Many open and covered storage areas.
HEAD RESTRAINTS	The adjustable center restraint provides only adequate protection in the upper position.
CHILD SEATS	Some rear-facing seats may be difficult to secure in the center position because of the narrow raised center cushion.



SOMETHING BORROWED

A version of Chrysler's Uconnect infotainment system, with an 8.4-inch screen, is simple to use.

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of that
Used Car
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Surprising new sports sedans

The updated Buick Regal and Volvo S60 challenge the class leaders



BMW, MERCEDES, AND ... BUICK? Among upscale sporty sedans, the BMW 328i and Mercedes-Benz C250 have topped our Ratings. Now the recently freshened Buick Regal and Volvo S60 are giving their sportier and more prestigious German competition a serious challenge—for less money.

If you still think of Buick as a brand only for octogenarians with a taste for whitewall tires and vinyl roof treatments, the Regal will change your mind in one test drive. It's a thoroughly developed and satisfying mid-sized sports sedan that's more reminiscent of an Audi A4 than a softly sprung luxobarge. That European feel is no coincidence, because the Regal is based on a German design from General Motors' Opel division.

For 2014 the Regal got a 259-hp, 2.0-liter turbocharged four-cylinder engine that boosts performance and fuel economy. Other changes include improved controls, an upgraded infotainment system, and more standard features. Overall, that helped the Regal tie the C250 for second place in our class Ratings while costing several thousand dollars less.

The S60 has benefited from a new-for-2015 powertrain, called Drive-E, that features an eight-speed automatic transmission and a turbocharged four-cylinder engine. It's a sign of things to come; over the next few

years, Volvo's familiar five- and six-cylinder engines will be replaced by Drive-E designs. And if the one in our tested S60 T5 is any indication, those engines won't be missed.

The new powertrain transforms the S60 into a much more enjoyable and compelling car. Very comfortable seats highlight a well-finished interior. And a safety highlight is

an automatic braking system that can help avoid low-speed crashes. But the ride is overly firm, and the S60 lacks the handling of a true sports sedan.

Only the Regal is recommended because we don't yet have reliability data on the S60's new powertrain. Other S60s have had average reliability.

Ratings Upscale sporty sedans

In performance order.

✓ Recommended

● Excellent
● Very good
○ Good
● Fair
● Poor

Rec.	Rank	Make & model	Price as tested	In this issue	Overall road-test score	Predicted reliability	Overall mpg
					0 100 P F G VG E		
✓	1	BMW 328i	\$43,195		84	○	28
✓	2	Buick Regal Premium I	34,485	•	83	○	24
✓	3	Mercedes-Benz C250	40,705		83	○	24
	4	Volvo S60 T5 Drive-E (Premier Plus)	39,920	•	80	new	25
	5	Volkswagen CC Sport (2.0T)	32,800		78	●	26
	6	Infiniti Q50 Premium (AWD)	44,855		75	new	21
	7	Audi A4 Premium Quattro	35,895		74	●	25
	8	Lexus IS 250 (AWD)	43,823		58	●	21

Why some models are not recommended. The Volvo S60 and Infiniti Q50 are too new for us to have reliability data. The Volkswagen CC has had below-average reliability. The Audi A4 rated Poor in the IIHS small-overlap crash test. The Lexus IS 250 didn't score high enough in our tests.



Buick Regal

MAKE NO MISTAKE: The Regal is not your traditional Buick. With its agile handling, supple and controlled ride, high-quality interior, and quiet cabin, it's a highly capable car for people who enjoy driving and appreciate a Eurocentric ambience. At \$34,485 for our nicely equipped tested sedan, the Regal also costs thousands less than alternatives such as the Audi A4 or Volvo S60.

Freshened for 2014, the Regal builds on its solid foundations with a revised 2.0-liter turbocharged four-cylinder engine that makes the car quicker and more fuel-efficient. Also, all-wheel drive is now available, controls are improved, the infotainment system is upgraded, and the standard equipment list has become more lavish.

The turbo engine accelerates effortlessly, posting a 0-to-60-mph time of 7.4 seconds. The smooth-shifting six-speed automatic transmission is quick and responsive. Even though this is a powerful front-wheel-drive car, torque steer is almost absent.

We measured 24 mpg overall, which is midpack for this category, but unlike many turbocharged engines, the Regal doesn't require premium fuel. That said, some V6-powered midsized sedans without the Regal's sporty intentions are quicker and more fuel-efficient.

GM's e-Assist mild-hybrid powertrain is also available. It provides a 5-mpg overall gain in fuel mileage but extracts a penalty in trunk space and performance.

The Regal rides very well, with a trace of firmness at lower speeds. Handling is agile and tied down, but it's not in the same

league as the best sports sedans. The steering is appropriately weighted, with quick turn-in response. On the track, the Regal was quite capable, snaking through our avoidance maneuver at a commendable speed of 53.5 mph with plenty of grip.

The interior is nicely finished overall. It has padded surfaces and a mixture of glossy wood and metallic trim. Drivers will find supportive seats and ample elbow room, as well as a tilt-and-telescopic steering wheel that has a good range of adjustment. Like other sports sedans, the Regal's rear seat is snug. And access is made more difficult than necessary by the low roof.

The infotainment system is straightforward and easy to use, including steering-wheel shortcuts and a small screen in the instrument panel. Thick pillars and a high rear deck limit visibility, but the standard backup camera helps. Trunk room is quite large and free of obstructions.

Best version to get. All Regals come with a leather interior, a power driver's seat, and automatic climate control. The Premium I trim on our tested car adds a power passenger seat, heated steering wheel, and the availability of a hybrid powertrain. To get electronic safety systems such as blind-spot monitoring and forward-collision warning requires the Premium II trim, which also brings HID headlights. Enthusiasts may prefer the seldom seen but capable GS version, with its slightly more aggressive styling, available stick shift, bigger wheels and tires, and sports seats.



Tested vehicle

HIGHS	Acceleration, ride, handling, braking, easy-to-use infotainment system
LOWS	Rear seat, rear visibility
TRIM LINE	Premium I
DRIVETRAIN	259-hp, 2.0-liter turbocharged four-cylinder engine; six-speed automatic transmission; front-wheel drive
MAJOR OPTIONS	Sunroof, 18-inch aluminum wheels
TESTED PRICE	\$34,485

More test findings

BRAKING	Excellent performance.
HEADLIGHTS	Standard halogens lack sufficient intensity and distance. Optional HID lights provide much brighter light and more visibility.
ACCESS	The low roof intrudes.
VISIBILITY	Thick roof pillars limit visibility, especially to the rear. A backup camera is standard.
CABIN STORAGE	Very little for a car of this size.
HEAD RESTRAINTS	The rear-center restraint is not tall enough to provide protection.
CHILD SEATS	LATCH anchors are included for a center-seat installation.



COMMAND CENTRAL The Regal has an easy-to-use infotainment system and comprehensive connectivity features.

Volvo S60

SOLID, PRACTICAL, and quiet, the S60 brings to mind the qualities you might want in a good neighbor. It's the upstanding citizen of European sedans. But if you want fun and excitement, shop elsewhere.

The S60's 2015 freshening brought styling tweaks and a new 240-hp, 2.0-liter turbocharged four-cylinder engine. Matched with an eight-speed automatic transmission, it results in a marked improvement in drivability, fuel economy, and refinement. Power is generous and smooth, with a well-integrated turbo that makes the car very responsive and provides effortless power. We also measured a decent 25 mpg overall.

Handling is fairly nimble, responsive, and secure, although the car doesn't really live up to its sports-sedan pretensions. The steering is appropriately weighted but not very quick or communicative. When pushed to its handling limits, the S60 was secure and composed, posting a commendable speed of 54 mph through our avoidance maneuver.

The ride is so firm that it borders on being stiff. It's an unfortunate trait that has become something of a Volvo hallmark.

As you'd expect from the brand, safety is a big part of the S60's package. It provides a long list of advanced features, including the standard City Safety system, which can automatically brake the car to avoid or reduce the severity of a low-speed collision. Crash-test results are excellent as well.

Inside you'll find a well-finished and reasonably quiet interior with a simple, clean

design. Front seats are roomy and very comfortable, but the rear seat is snug, with tight leg and head room. The coupelike styling limits rear visibility and contributes to a cramped rear seat. Trunk room is decent.

Oddly for a brand that has built a reputation for safety, a backup camera is standard only on upper trim levels; it's an expensive option on lower trims. And though the infotainment system is up to date, it's not particularly easy to use. With the optional \$1,485 Sensus Connected Touch system, you can browse the Internet (except when driving), stream Internet radio, and use Google Maps, among other features. More important, you get audio voice-command capability, which our car sorely lacked.

The S60 does not come with a spare tire. Instead, it's equipped with a tire sealant and air-compressor kit.

Overall, the 2015 update helps the S60 stay competitive, although it has neither the spirited performance nor the country-club status of its German alternatives. But for some buyers, that's part of its appeal.

Best version to get. Base models start at \$33,300 and are well-equipped, including dual power front seats and Bluetooth. But to get popular niceties such as leather seats, a backup camera, and other electronic safety and convenience features, the \$3,250 Premier Plus trim is the best bet. The 2.0-liter engine offers the best blend of power and fuel economy, but it's not available with all-wheel drive. We'd skip the Sports package, which makes the ride feel even stiffer.



Tested vehicle

HIGHS	Acceleration, fuel economy, front-seat comfort, braking, safety equipment, crash-test results
LOWS	Ride, snug rear seat, rear visibility, some controls
TRIM LINE	T5 Drive-E Premier Plus
DRIVETRAIN	240-hp, 2.0-liter turbocharged four-cylinder engine; eight-speed automatic transmission; front-wheel drive
MAJOR OPTIONS	Blind-spot monitoring system, metallic paint, heated front seats, wood trim
TESTED PRICE	\$39,920

More test findings

BRAKING	Short stopping distances.
HEADLIGHTS	Good visibility to the front and sides, with a softer transition between light and dark than many vehicles.
ACCESS	OK into the front; you need to duck for the rear seat.
VISIBILITY	The sloping rear window impedes the view rearward. A backup camera is standard only on higher trims.
CABIN STORAGE	Modest and not easy to find.
HEAD RESTRAINTS	Rear head restraints fold remotely to aid visibility.
CHILD SEATS	Limited LATCH access and forward-mounted seat belts may make the installation of a child seat difficult.



BUTTONED DOWN By pressing this button, the rear head restraints can be folded to optimize rear visibility.



Cars \ Comparison

✓ Recommended



VERSION	Mercedes-Benz S-Class	Audi A3	Maserati Ghibli	Buick Regal	Volvo S60
TRIM LINE	\$550	Premium	S Q4	Premium I	T5 Drive-E
PRICE: BASE/TESTED ①	\$95,900/\$114,475	\$29,900/\$31,495	\$76,900/\$89,010	\$31,560/\$34,485	\$33,300/\$39,920
DRIVETRAIN					
Engine	4.6-liter V8 (449 hp) turbo	1.8-liter 4-cyl. (170 hp) turbo	3.0-liter V6 (404 hp) turbo	2.0-liter 4-cyl. (259 hp) turbo	2.0-liter 4-cyl. (240 hp) turbo
Transmission	7-speed automatic	6-speed sequential	8-speed automatic	6-speed automatic	8-speed automatic
Drive wheels	AWD	Front	AWD	Front	Front
TIRES TESTED					
Model & size	Continental ProContact GX SSR, size 245/45R19 102H (front), 275/40R19 101H (rear)	Continental ContiProContact, size 225/45R17 91 H	Pirelli P Zero, size 245/45ZR19 98Y (front), 275/40R19 101Y (rear)	Michelin Primacy MXM4, size P235/50R18 97V	Continental ContiProContact, size 235/45R17 97V
RATINGS					
PERFORMANCE					
Acceleration	●	●	●	●	●
0 to 60 mph, sec.	5.1	8.3	5.4	7.4	7.9
45 to 65 mph, sec.	3.5	5.1	3.7	4.9	5.0
Quarter-mile, sec.	13.5	16.4	14.0	15.9	16.2
Transmission	●	●	●	●	●
Routine handling	●	●	●	●	●
Emergency handling	○	●	●	●	●
Avoidance maneuver, speed, mph	51.0	53.0	53.5	53.5	54.0
Braking	●	●	●	●	●
From 60 mph, dry/wet, ft.	128/138	124/127	115/125	125/134	128/135
Headlights	○	●	●	●	○
COMFORT AND CONVENIENCE					
Ride	●	○	●	●	○
Noise	●	○	○	●	●
Driving position	●	●	○	●	●
Front-seat comfort	●	●	●	●	●
Rear-seat comfort	●	●	○	○	○
Access	●	○	○	●	●
Controls and displays	●	○	○	●	●
Interior fit and finish	●	●	●	●	●
Trunk	○	●	○	○	○
PREDICTED RELIABILITY	New	New	New	○	New
FUEL					
Overall mpg	18	27	19	24	25
City/highway mpg	12/28	18/40	12/27	15/35	16/38
Type	premium	premium	premium	regular	regular
Capacity, gal./Cruising range, miles	21.1/385	13.2/360	21.0/395	18.6/440	17.8/455
Annual cost, 12K miles	\$2,620 @ \$4/gallon	\$1,760 @ \$4/gallon	\$2,565 @ \$4/gallon	\$1,925 @ \$3.80/gallon	\$1,790 @ \$3.80/gallon
SAFETY					
CRASH TESTS					
IIHS moderate/small-overlap frontal	NA	Good/Good	Good	Good	Good/Good
IIHS side	NA	Good	Good	Good	Good
IIHS rear	NA	Good	Good	Good	Good
IIHS roof strength	NA	Good	Good	Good	Good
NHTSA front, driver/passenger	NA/NA	NA/NA	NA/NA	●/●	●/●
NHTSA side, driver/rear	NA/NA	NA/NA	NA/NA	●/●	●/●
NHTSA rollover 2WD/4WD	NA/NA	NA/NA	NA/NA	●/●	●/●
AIR BAGS					
Side, front/rear	std./std.	std./opt.	std./no	std./opt.	std./no
Head protection	standard	standard	standard	std. w/rollover	standard
SPECIFICATIONS					
DIMENSIONS AND WEIGHT					
Length/width/height, in.	207/75/59	175/70/56	196/77/58	190/73/58	182/73/58
Wheelbase, in.	125	104	118	108	109
Turning circle, ft.	41	37	40	39	38
Curb weight, lb. (% front/rear)	4,935 (53/47)	3,135 (60/40)	4,625 (52/48)	3,710 (60/40)	3,610 (62/38)
Maximum load, lb.	915	1,100	925	925	1,025
Luggage, suitcases+duffels	2+3	2+1	2+2	3+1	3+0
Towing capacity, lb.	NR	NR	NR	NR	3,500
INTERIOR ROOM					
Front shoulder room, in.	59.0	54.5	57.5	56.5	56.5
Front leg room, in.	45.0	42.0	42.0	43.0	41.0
Front head room, in. ②	3.5	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.5
Rear shoulder room, in.	57.0	51.5	55.5	53.0	53.5
Rear leg room, in.	33.0	26.0	26.0	29.0	28.0
Rear head room, in. ②	3.0	1.0	2.5	1.5	2.5

① Based on sticker price at time of purchase. ② Above a person 5'9" tall.

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Goofs, glitches, gotchas



IS THAT ALL?

It didn't actually take 62 days to put this toy together, a reader reports, "but close."



DINNER AND A FUNERAL

How about a movie, too—say, "Heaven Can Wait"?



READY, SET ...

Two readers sent this in, and the one from Virginia said: "I just can't wait to get my case of acne started. How about you?"



WE'RE WAITING, TOO

"I wonder when the moms show up?" asked the reader in California who sent in this coupon.



For entertainment purposes only

WHAT FUN!

"Because," a reader writes, "it's so hilarious to test your teenager."



SPATULA SWITCHEROO

We can only hope that the toilet gasket didn't end up in someone's mixing bowl.

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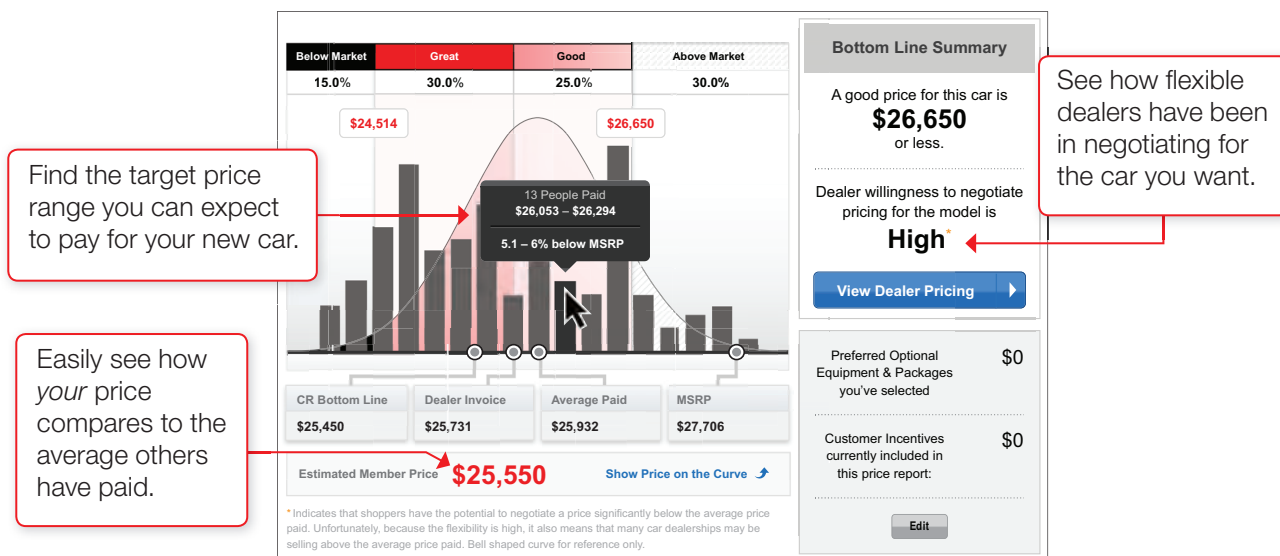
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PE44CURVES1

Canada Extra

Information from CONSUMER REPORTS® for Canadian readers

How to use the Canada Extra section

Every month, Canada Extra provides Canadian pricing and availability information about products tested for that issue. The Ratings in this section are based on this month's reports, but they narrow your choices to the products that are sold in Canada.

You can use this section in either of two ways: Start with the main report, read about the products that interest you, and turn to this section to find whether they're sold—and for what price—in Canada. Or start here, find products sold in Canada whose price and overall score appear promising,

and read more about them in the main report and full Ratings chart; page numbers appear with each Canadian report. (For some products, the Canadian model designation differs slightly from the one used in the U.S.)



In most cases, the prices we list here are the approximate retail in Canadian dollars; manufacturers' list prices are indicated by an asterisk (*). Check marks identify CR Best Buys or recommended products in the U.S. Ratings. "NA" in a chart means that information wasn't available from the manufacturer. We include, in the Contact Info list

on page 32D, the manufacturer's phone number and Web address in Canada so that you can call or go online to get information on a model you can't find in the stores. (Many products that aren't available in Canadian stores can be bought online.)

We appreciate your support, but we don't take it for granted. Please write to CanadaExtra@cu.consumer.org and tell us what you think. We can't reply to every e-mail message or implement every suggestion, but with your help we'll try to keep growing to serve your needs.

IN THIS SPECIAL SECTION

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-  **CR Best Buy** Products with this icon offer the best combination of performance and price. All are recommended.
-  **Recommended** Models with this designation perform well and stand out for reasons we note.

Pod coffeemakers

Report, page 44; Ratings, page 45

Twelve of the tested pod coffeemakers are available, including two of the recommended models.

Rec.	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Beverage options	Overall score
					0 100 P F G VG E
✓	1	DeLonghi Nescafé Dolce Gusto Genio EDG455T (Nescafé capsules)	\$140	18	78
✓	4	Starbucks Verismo 600 (Verismo pods)	150	12	73
	5	Nespresso VertuoLine (VertuoLine capsules)	300	12	68
	6	Bosch Tassimo T55 (Tassimo T Discs)	140	56	67
	8	Starbucks Verismo 580 (Verismo pods)	120	12	65
	10	Cuisinart SS-300 Compact Single Serve (K-Cups)	140	227+	62
	13	Keurig Mini Plus Brewing System (K-Cups)	100	227+	60
	15	Keurig Platinum B70 (K-Cups) ^①	200	227+	59
	16	Mr. Coffee Single Serve Brewing System BVMC-KG1 (K-Cups) ^① BVMC-KG2	80	227+	58
	20	Bosch Tassimo Suprema T47 (Tassimo T Discs)	120	56	56
	21	Cuisinart SS-700C (K-Cups) ^①	250	227+	52
	29	Hamilton Beach FlexBrew 49995RC (K-Cups, Senseo-like pods) ^②	60	238+	25

^① Discontinued, but similar model is available; price is for similar model. ^② Programmable.

^② Can brew two pods at once for a stronger or larger serving.

Printers

Report and Ratings, page 43

Recommended models only, from 46 tested.

Rec.	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Overall score
				0 100 P F G VG E
✓	1	Canon Pixma MX922	\$130	73
✓	4	Brother MFC-J6520DW	250	71
✓	5	Brother MFC-J650DW	140	70
✓	6	HP Envy 4500	100	70

Recalls

1999-2004 Chrysler models

Chrysler Canada will embark on a voluntary recall in order to reduce the risk of possible fuel leakage and to improve performance in certain low-speed collisions. **Models** 62,760 Jeep Grand Cherokee vehicles.

What to do Manufacturer will inspect vehicles, determine risk to fuel tank, and install a Chrysler trailer hitch if necessary.

2012-2013 Chrysler models

The power-steering line may wear alongside the automatic transmission oil cooler line, causing a transmission-fluid leak. That may cause loss of transmission fluid, resulting in risk of a crash.

Models 18,407 Jeep Wrangler vehicles.

What to do Have dealer either add a protective sleeve or replace the transmission line.

2013 Chrysler models

Air bag may deploy unnecessarily in some side-impact collisions. In addition, the opposite-side air bag may deploy, causing risk to occupant.

Models 49,282 Ram Cargo Van, Dodge Grand Caravan, and Town & Country vehicles.

What to do Have dealer reprogram occupant restraint control (ORC) module with updated software.

2013 Ford models

Vehicles with 1.6L engines may overheat as a result of flammable fluid leak. This may result in a fire.

Models 10,650 Escape and Fusion vehicles.

What to do Have the dealer reprogram the powertrain control and instrument panel cluster modules to improve the system's ability to detect and mitigate an overheating condition. Also have the dealer inspect for coolant leaks.

2010-2012 General Motors models

Vehicles may not conform to the Canada Motor Vehicle Safety Standard (CMVSS). The hood may be missing the secondary hood latch. If the primary latch is not engaged properly, the hood may open while the vehicle is in motion.

Models 15,264 GMC Canyon and Chevrolet Colorado vehicles.

What to do Have dealer inspect and, if necessary, replace the hood.

2003-2006 Honda models

The ignition interlock blocking mechanism may become damaged if extreme force is applied to the ignition key. As a result, the ignition key may be removed while the gear is in a position other than the park position.

Models 52,441 2003-2006 Acura MDX, 2003-2004 Honda Odyssey, and 2003-2004 Honda Pilot vehicles.

What to do Have dealer install an updated ignition interlock lever and replace the ignition lock cylinder if necessary.

2007-2008 Honda Fit

Water may enter driver's power window switch. The previous fix to install a plastic cover over the fix was inadequate. Water may cause the switch to overheat and result in fire.

Models 34,881 vehicles.

What to do Have dealer inspect and, if necessary replace the driver's power-window master switch.

2004-2009 Toyota Prius

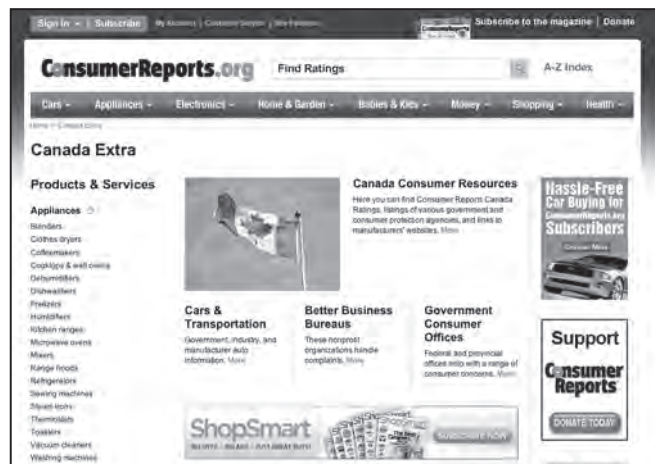
The electrical water pump assembly may fail. That may cause coolant to cease to circulate, and warning lights may illuminate in the instrument panel, and could cause engine to stall.

Models 8,740 vehicles.

What to do Have dealer replace the electrical water pump.

Canada Extra on the Web

Canada Extra information can be found on ConsumerReports.org, our website, along with the current issue of the magazine and more. The address is ConsumerReports.org. Once there, click on the "Canada Extra" link on the opening screen. There you can see which reports have Canadian information available.



Autos

Report and Ratings, pages 52-60

All of the tested vehicles are available in Canada.

Make & model	Price range	Acceleration (sec.)				Fuel economy (liters per 100 km)		
		0-50 km/h	0-100 km/h	80-100 km/h	500 meters	City driving	Highway driving	Overall
ULTRA-LUXURY SEDANS								
Mercedes-Benz S-Class	\$108,200-\$156,400	2.3	5.3	2.7	15.4	20.1	8.5	12.8
Maserati Ghibli	75,800-87,200	2.5	5.8	2.5	15.9	18.9	8.7	12.6
UPSCALE COMPACT SEDAN								
Audi A3	31,100-43,200	3.3	8.7	3.7	18.8	13.1	5.9	8.6
UPSCALE SPORTY SEDANS								
Buick Regal	33,095-42,925	3.0	8.0	3.5	18.2	15.3	6.7	9.9
Volvo S60	37,750-53,750	3.3	8.4	3.7	18.5	14.3	6.2	9.2

Contact info

How to reach manufacturers in Canada.

Bosch
877-834-7271
tassimo.ca

Brother
877-276-8437
brother.ca

Canon
canon.ca

Cuisinart
800-472-7606
cuisinart.ca

DeLonghi
888-809-9267
dolce-gusto.ca

Hamilton Beach
800-267-2826
hamiltonbeach.ca

HP
800-474-6836
hp.ca

Keurig
866-901-2739
keurig.ca

Mr. Coffee
800-672-6333
mrcoffee.com

Nespresso
855-350-5812
nespresso.ca

Starbucks
855-271-6217
starbucks.ca